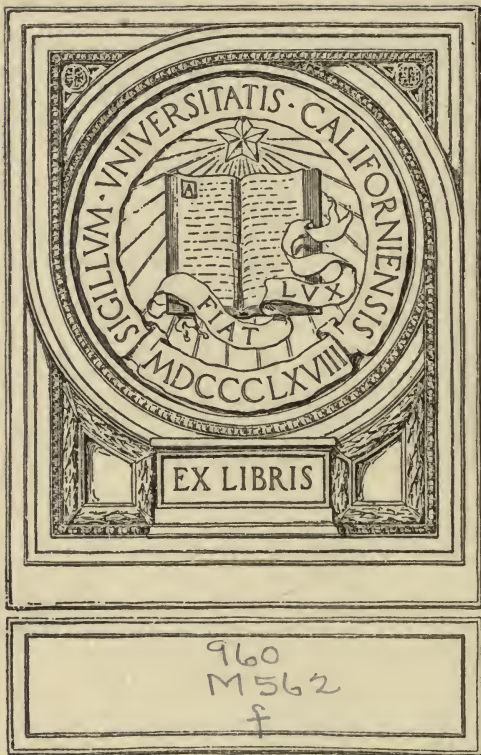


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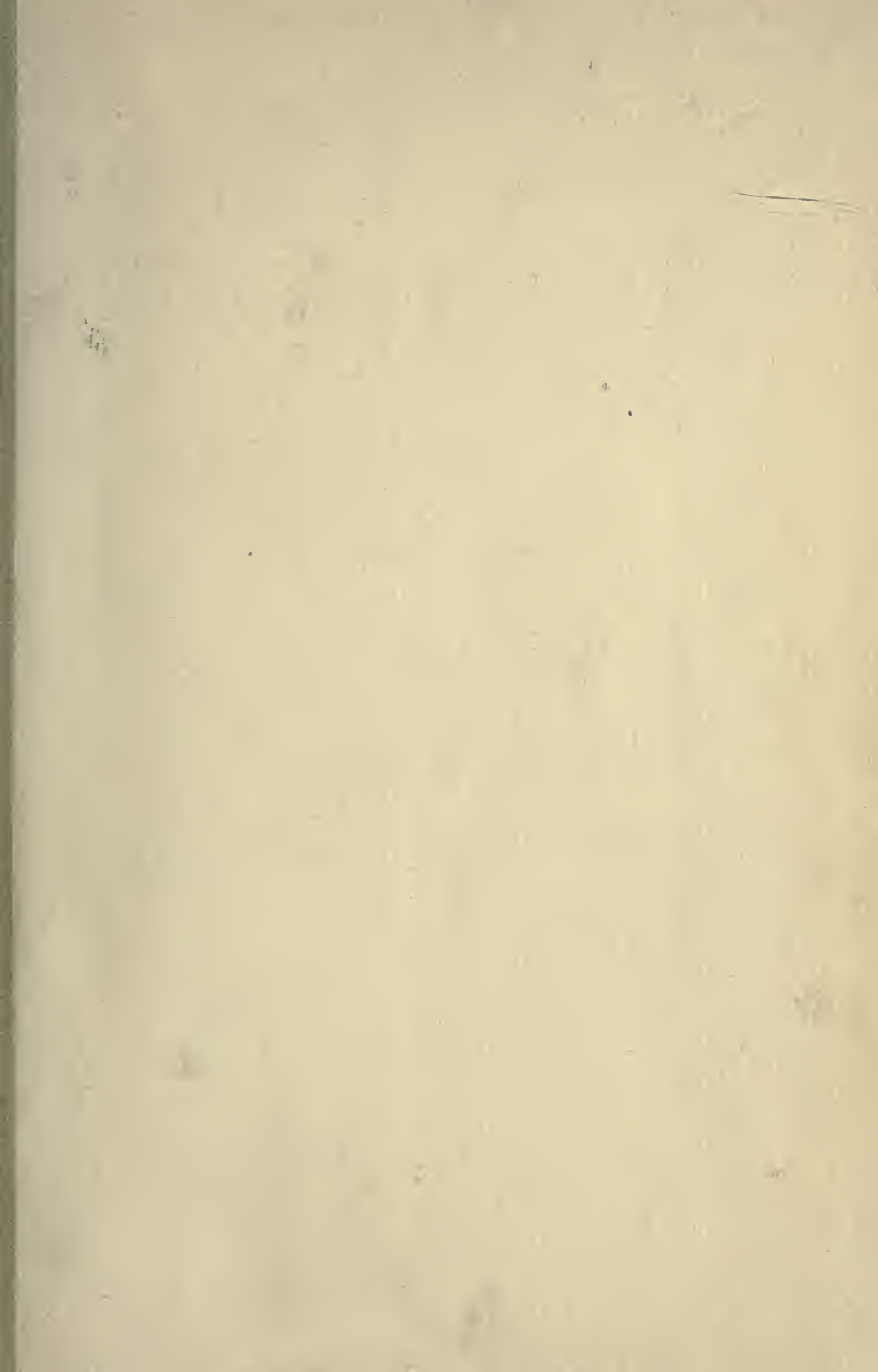
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BY

MARGUERITE MERINGTON

AUTHOR OF

"HOLIDAY PLAYS," "FESTIVAL PLAYS," ETC.



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FAIRY TALE PLAYS

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

Fairy-play in two Acts with closing Scene.
Act II in Granny's cot. Act I and closing Scene
in the forest.

CHARACTERS.

Children.

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD	MARGERY DAW
SILVER LOCKS	LITTLE TOM THUMB
GOODY TWO SHOES	JOHNNY JUMP-UP and others

Grown-ups.

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD'S	THE SCHOOLMASTER
MOTHER	BERTRAM, the forester
HER GRANDMOTHER	HODGE, his assistant
TULIPINA MEGGS, a proud	THE CONSTABLE
peat	THE PARSON

AND OTHERS

Four-footed Characters.

SPOT, BERTRAM'S dog	THE WOLF
---------------------	----------

Also

ROBIN GOODFELLOW	MOTHER GOOSE
AND FAIRIES.	

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

ACT I

The scene represents a clearing in a forest. A log can be used as a seat. Paths lead, one, to the rear, toward the village; one, on one hand, to the school-house, on the other into the heart of the forest.

Enter BERTRAM, followed by SPOT, in earnest talk with HODGE.

BERTRAM.

I tell you, Hodge, that hoarse, deep bark o' nights, the way the cattle are bitten from the rear . . . all signs point to there being a wolf in the forest!

HODGE.

A wolf, Master Bertram? Now, had you said an elfin or an elephant, a bear or a brownie, I could take it in. But, a wolf? [*Shakes head.*]

BERTRAM.

[*Stooping to examine the ground at which SPOT is sniffing.*] And, what is more, he has passed this way. Eh, Spot?

HODGE.

Of course, Master Bertram, you being head Ranger, it is not my place to dispute you. But, a wolf? When we're taught in school that the species be ex-extinctured. Extunct. Ex-something! Eh, Schoolmaster? [*Addressing the SCHOOLMASTER who comes by, eyes glued on the page of a book.*]

SCHOOLMASTER.

Extinct. Correct, my worthy Hodge. In this locality the wolf is extinct.

CONSTABLE.

[*Approaching from the village.*] Exterminated, rather. It's over a hundred years, now. The King issued a proclamation, levying a tax on wolves. My own ancestor who at the time was Constable like me, despatched the last of the tribe. The creature had insulted the law. In fact, after eating up six village gossips at a sitting, it attacked my ancestor's calves! Odds bobs, man! Such liberties are not to be put up with lightly! Since then the wolf appears on the statute books exterminated! [*Emphasizes with staff.*] Ex-terminated!

PARSON.

[*Strolling by, jotting down notes in note-book.*] And his evil spirit exorcised, and his skin nailed to the church-door, as a warning to gluttons! Never forget that, my friends! My own predecessor in office of the period com-

posed the Latin inscription that records the fact! I regret to say that he made a mistake or so in quantities!

HODGE.

Who made a mistake in quantities? The wolf? With six gossips inside him?

PARSON.

Tut, tut! I refer to my predecessor and his Latin prosody!

HODGE.

I see! But about this wolf, with the breed extincted in history and exterminated by law, and exorcised by the church I can't see that there's the ghost of one alive, and so, Master Bertram, you routed me out of my bed at day-break all for naught, as it seems!

BERTRAM.

I tell you, lad, there's something truer than history!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Eh! What's that?

BERTRAM.

Aye, and stronger than the statutes.

CONSTABLE.

Never, sir! Not while I hold office.

BERTRAM.

Something greater, even, than the church's authority, saving your Reverence's presence!

PARSON.

Tut, tut, my good Bertram. That smacks of heresy!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Ignorance! Pure and simple!

CONSTABLE.

Treason! Out and out high treason!

HODGE.

You hear, Master Bertram? For all you be Royal Ranger you are ignorant, treasonable, and heretical, when you rout me out of bed to find a wolf in the forest! But, pray, what is this unknown power you talk about?

BERTRAM.

[*Who has been cleaning his gun.*] The natural law, my boy. The wish, the will, of all created things to live, and to stay alive, and to have children like them that shall go on living, and have children like them in their turn, to the end of time!

HODGE.

[*Scratching head, puzzled.*] Do I get that, or do I not?

BERTRAM.

Use your senses! Look about you! See what a fight all living things put up, merely to stay alive, through cold and poverty, hunger, heat! Look at the down-trodden grass! Can you keep it down? Mark yon tree, struck by

lightning! yet see how it puts forth tender shoots about its root! See how the moss forces the rock to yield it nourishment! Hear the birds, huddling in their nests! Think of all the men and women you know, struggling to stay alive and to have their children and grandchildren follow in their steps!

HODGE.

True that is, Master Bertram, about folk craving to stay alive, even when their room might be thought preferable to their company! Why, take old Gammer Gurton in yonder cot—[*points forestward*—]—bedridden for a score of years! Yet you can't argue her into going to Heaven, though it's high time the parish should be treated to another funeral.

BERTRAM.

Well, what is true of men and women is a thousand times truer of their savage brethren! Therefore, I say, take heed! For all your Latin inscriptions, history and statutes, some of you yet may find yourselves willy nilly inside a wolf-skin coat. Eh, Spot? [*Caresses SPOT who wags approvingly.*] You see? Spot knows that the descendant of the last of his tribe is alive to-day, and prowling somewhere about this forest! Come, Spot. [*Whistles, goes off into the forest.*]

SCHOOLMASTER.

Ignorance! Pure ignorance, and so would I prove it, but being an extremely conscientious teacher, I try to keep a lesson ahead of my pupils! [*Resumes work.*]

CONSTABLE.

Treason! High treason! I'd arrest him, only my handcuffs are rusty, and won't lock! [*Producing these articles.*]

PARSON.

Heresy, I fear! However, this is already Friday, and I only have reached Fourteenthly! [*The voices of CHILDREN are heard, as they come from the village.*]

SCHOOLMASTER, CONSTABLE AND PARSON.

[*Hearing the voices.*] All the same . . . the children! . . . Ho, Master Bertram! Bertram, what ho!

BERTRAM.

[*Returning.*] Who calls?

PARSON.

While denying the presence of your wolf we recognize that of the juvenile population . . . my troublesome little catechumens——

SCHOOLMASTER.

On whose existence depends my salary.

CONSTABLE.

Without whom there would be no future malefactors to justify my existence, officially speaking.

BERTRAM.

Whom you all adore. For whom you'd all lay down your lives!

THE THREE.

Certainly not! Nothing of the sort!

SCHOOLMASTER.

In case of some prehistoric survival being still at large . . . a dinosaurus, or a dodo——

HODGE.

Or a loblolly, an evil spirit——

PARSON.

Tut, tut, my lad! Some peculiarly noxious microbe . . . some evil germ——

CONSTABLE.

Or plain wild beast. Odds bobs, man, what are you going to do about the children?

THE OTHERS

That's it: the children!

BERTRAM.

Lay a trap . . . a trap for the enemy . . . right here, on the path to the school-house!

THE OTHERS.

[*Interested.*] A trap?

HODGE.

A trap, Master Bertram? With what will you bait it, sir?

BERTRAM.

With what the enemy likes best—the children!

THE OTHERS.

[*Horried, holding up hands.*] The children! [*They shake heads, exchanging glances.*]

BERTRAM.

[*Nodding affirmation.*] The children! [*The voices draw nearer.*] Hodge, lad, guard the pathway! [*HODGE goes forestward.*] No, no; leave the approach clear for the enemy. Guard the means of escape, the road to school! [*HODGE obeys. The CHILDREN come, laughing, skipping, playing, on their way to school.*]

SILVER LOCKS.

I have an oat cake with honey for my dinner.

MARGERY DAW.

I have an apple dumpling.

TOM THUMB.

Oh, here's Spot! Hi, old Spot!

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

And here's Master Bertram! [*They fall on him.*] Oh, Master Bertram, tell us a story!

BERTRAM.

A story? Nonsense! I have work to do, and so have you!

SILVER LOCKS.

It's early. The school bell hasn't rung yet.

RED RIDING HOOD.

Tell one as a birthday present to me, Master Bertram.
It's my birthday.

BERTRAM.

Eh? Whose birthday is it?

RED RIDING HOOD.

Mine.

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

Little Red Riding Hood's!

RED RIDING HOOD.

Guess how old I am!

BERTRAM.

No need to guess. I know!

RED RIDING HOOD.

Oh, did someone tell you? The fairies? Or a little
bird?

BERTRAM.

Both! You are as young as to-morrow, and as old as
the hills! And that is true of every blessed one of you!

THE CHILDREN.

How nice! But, come! [*They push BERTRAM on to*

the log.] The story! [*They gather about him.*] Now begin!

BERTRAM.

How shall I begin?

GOODY TWO SHOES.

The way all stories begin—all true stories, that is!

ALL THE CHILDREN.

Once upon a time.

SOME OF THE CHILDREN.

Or, it happened, once upon a time.

BERTRAM.

Very well, then. It happened once upon a time——

THE CHILDREN.

Ah-h-h!

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Looks up from book.*] Once upon a time, indeed! Why not be accurate? Why not mention the exact date?

CONSTABLE.

In whose reign? Tell me that! Under what customs?

PARSON.

At least state whether B. C. or A. D. Before or after the Christian era?

BERTRAM.

Both! [*The other GROWN-UPS shake heads, dissatisfied.*] What shall the story be about? Eh, Silver Locks?

SILVER LOCKS.

About gispies!

BERTRAM.

[*Puzzled.*] Gispies?

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

[*Laugh, and explain.*] Gipsies. She means gipsies!

SILVER LOCKS.

That's it. About a little girl who was stolen away by gis . . . gipsies!

CONSTABLE.

Couldn't happen! Not while I'm in office.

THE CHILDREN.

[*Vexed by interruptions.*] Oh, de-ar!

BERTRAM.

Since gipsies are barred, Little Goody Two Shoes, what is your choice?

GOODY TWO SHOES.

Fairies, if you please, sir!

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

[*Jumping up and down.*] Oh, yes; fairies!

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Disgusted.*] Fairies! What are fairies?

THE CHILDREN.

[*Surprised.*] Why don't you know? They're fairies!

BERTRAM.

They are the plums in the story-pudding; eh, children?

THE CHILDREN.

Oh, yes, Master Bertram.

SILVER LOCKS.

And mind you put in plenty!

BERTRAM.

Here goes then, for fairies! Once upon——

THE CHILDREN.

Ah-h-h!

HODGE.

[*Pauses in his patrolling.*] And if it's not too great a liberty, Master Bertram, you'll ring in a bit, won't you, about Robin Goodfellow? I can't help laughing at the rogue's merry tricks! Ha, ha!

THE CHILDREN.

Oh, yes! Dear Robin Goodfellow! Now begin——

BERTRAM.

Here goes, then, for Robin! It happened once——

THE CHILDREN.

Ah-h-h-h!

CONSTABLE.

[*Craning forward to listen.*] Eh? Who's that? Robin who? Some outlaw?

HODGE.

Why, no, Master Constable. At least, not one you can lay your hands on. Just a puckish, impish rogue, who turns up, every now and then, when you're least looking for him! No real harm in him! Just likes to play tricks . . . turn things topsy-turvy, you know! Leaps out of dark corners to make you squeal, or pinches fat folks' legs, you know!

CONSTABLE.

[*With great dignity.*] I do not know. And I certainly shall arrest him the first time I lay hands on him, this Robin Goodfellow! [*Makes a note of the name.*]

BERTRAM.

Robin is the spice in the pudding, but we'll give him a holiday. Let me see; Margery Daw, what do you speak for?

MARGERY DAW.

Oh, Master Bertram, do bring in Mother Goose. Oh, I love her dearly, I do!

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

Oh, yes! Dear, dear Mother Goose!

BERTRAM.

Here goes then, for Mother Goose. It happened once——

THE CHILDREN.

Ah-h-h-h!

PARSON.

One moment, if you please!

THE CHILDREN.

Oh, dear! Won't they ever have done?

PARSON.

[*Consulting notebook.*] This . . . er . . . person just alluded to. Mother . . . er . . . Goose. I do not find her name on the list of my parishioners. I shall certainly pay a call on her. Name . . . er . . . Occupation?

BERTRAM.

She stirs the story-pudding! Eh, children? She boils the pot!

THE CHILDREN.

Oh, yes, Master Bertram. Do go on with the story. It happened once upon a time——

SCHOOLMASTER.

Before you go further there is one thing should be settled for good and all.

THE CHILDREN.

Oh, dear!

SCHOOLMASTER.

About fairies!

THE CHILDREN.

[*Unexpectedly pleased.*] Oh, about fairies? Do you know about fairies?

SCHOOLMASTER.

Certainly not! Of course I know everything. That is, everything that there is to be known! But one cannot know about a thing when there is no such thing as such a thing! [*The CHILDREN cough, meaningly.*] Come, now, my little scholars; answer fearlessly, without expectation of a birching. Did anyone here present ever see a fairy?

CONSTABLE.

[*Nods approval.*] That's right. Pin 'em down!

PARSON.

Mighty is truth and shall prevail!

TOM THUMB.

[*After a slight pause.*] Spot sees them. You can tell by his tail!

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

Yes, Master!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Spot, forsooth!

CONSTABLE.

That's not evidence; neither Spot nor his tail! You never heard of a dog on the witness-stand!

SCHOOLMASTER.

I call on Jonathan Salter, nicknamed Johnny Jump-up——

JOHNNY JUMP-UP.

Here, sir. Present, sir. Which was to be proved, sir.

SCHOOLMASTER.

Forget your beloved lessons, little man. Speak freely, as from a boy who some day will be a man, to a man who once was a boy—— [*The CHILDREN murmur, incredulous.*] Yes, John, believe me, I am a pleasant man when not trying to earn my salary. Also I really was once a little boy like you!

JOHNNY JUMP-UP.

Yes, sir. No, sir. Which is absurd, sir!

SCHOOLMASTER.

John. On your honor, now. Did you ever see a fairy?

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

[*Expectantly.*] Ah!

JOHNNY JUMP-UP.

No, sir!

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

[*Shocked.*] Oh-h!

JOHNNY JUMP-UP.

That is, not in school hours, sir!

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

[*Relieved.*] Ee-ee!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Of course not in school hours! The only regrettable intrusion into the school-house, during my rule, was that of Mary's little lamb!

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

Oh, yes; Mary's little lamb! Oh, the darling! Its fleece was white as snow! And everywhere that Mary went——

SCHOOLMASTER.

It was against the rule!

CONSTABLE.

I should say so! Rate-payers won't stand for educating sheep!

SCHOOLMASTER.

It made the children laugh and play, to see a lamb in school!

PARSON.

And yet the incident was not wholly without a moral! What makes the lamb love Mary so? some of the infant class asked, the following Sabbath. Why, my children, I answered, for the simple reason that——

THE CHILDREN.

Mary loves the lamb, you know!

PARSON.

My very words!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Quite so. But about these anomalous beings, popularly termed fairies——

CONSTABLE.

And this outlaw, Robin Goodfellow——

PARSON.

And this venerable eccentric, Mother Goose——

SCHOOLMASTER.

Who has ever seen one of these characters? [*A pause, then, one after another the CHILDREN break into laughter which they try to smother. Suddenly HODGE breaks into a guffaw, slapping knees.*]

JOHNNY JUMP-UP.

Schoolmaster! There's one now! A fairy! After your pocket-handkerchief.

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

And now another! And a third! Fairies! Oh, the little dears!

HODGE.

And Robin himself, a-pinching Constable's legs! Go it, you rogue, you!

MARGERY DAW.

And Mother Goose herself, brushing Parson's hat with her broom! [*Three little folk in green are now seen, busy at the SCHOOLMASTER'S coat-tail pocket.*]

CONSTABLE.

[*Stamping and laying about him with staff.*] Who's pinching my legs?

THE CHILDREN.

[*In ecstasies.*] It's Robin Goodfellow! Dear Robin! Get him! Get him! [*A little sprite with a red cap is now seen teasing the CONSTABLE.*]

PARSON.

Who is taking liberties with my hat?

THE CHILDREN.

[*Capering about, overjoyed.*] It's Mother Goose! With her broom! [*MOTHER GOOSE is now visible. She sweeps off the PARSON'S hat. The FAIRIES throw down SCHOOLMASTER'S handkerchief and run off with mocking laughter. ROBIN GOODFELLOW also vanishes, as does*

MOTHER GOOSE, SPOT *barks joyously, the CHILDREN are overcome with mirth.*]

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*To JOHNNY-JUMP-UP who hands him his handkerchief.*] I thank you, Jonathan! I dropped it, in my absorption in my book!

CONSTABLE.

[*Rubbing his leg.*] A twinge of the rheumatism. This ground is very damp!

PARSON.

[*To MARGERY DAW who hands him his hat.*] I thank you, little girl. Really these twigs are most annoying. This forest should be better cleared!

THE CHILDREN.

[*Settling down again.*] And now for the story!
Once——

BERTRAM.

Once upon——

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Approaches Bertram confidentially.*] Ahem. About er . . . fairies. . . . Of course there's no such thing as such a thing as a fairy. However, to-day we'll let that pass.

BERTRAM.

Perhaps that would be wise!

SCHOOLMASTER.

That is, if you'll work in a little instruction. History, for instance. Even if it's only natural history!

BERTRAM.

Surely! Isn't it a fairy tale? . . . Once——

CONSTABLE.

[*Tugs BERTRAM's sleeve.*] Hold on, a bit! This outlaw, Robin; we'll let him go, for to-day! But you won't make fun of law and order, eh?

BERTRAM.

Never, in a fairy tale! Only of fat constables who let handcuffs grow rusty! . . . Once——

PARSON.

[*Taps BERTRAM on shoulder.*] This, er, Mother Goose may be a well-meaning person. I'll look her up. Meanwhile, Master Bertram, I take it, your tale will inculcate a wholesome moral, eh?

BERTRAM.

[*Hat off, respectfully.*] Your Reverence! Believe me, in all fairy-tales good always triumphs over evil!

PARSON.

As in life! Good. Now, pray proceed. It . . . er . . . took place——

SCHOOLMASTER.

The facts about to be narrated occurred——

CONSTABLE.

. . . according to the archives of the period——

PARSON.

Which are somewhat apocryphal——

THE CHILDREN.

It happened once upon a time!

BERTRAM.

It happened once——

THE CHILDREN.

Wait, Master Bertram!

BERTRAM.

Eh? What now?

THE CHILDREN.

You haven't told us what the story is about!

BERTRAM.

You have not told me, you mean! Little Red Riding Hood, it is your birthday, you shall choose!

RED RIDING HOOD.

Then, please, Master Bertram, if it is all the same to you I would like it to be my own story, about me!

BERTRAM.

About you, my dear?

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

Oh, *yes!* The story of Little Red Riding Hood!

BERTRAM.

Have I ever heard it?

RED RIDING HOOD.

You have to make it up, sir.

BERTRAM.

Oh, I have, have I?

RED RIDING HOOD.

I should like it to begin: Once upon a time there was a poor but honest couple who lived in a cottage on the outskirts of a forest. And this couple had an only child, a little girl! And every year this little girl had a birthday. A fresh one, all her own, every year!

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

Oh, *yes!*

RED RIDING HOOD.

And every birthday the kind mother made her little girl a new red cloak with a hood to it, that she might look fine when the father took them to the fair. And each year the cloak was longer and redder than the year before. And so all her playmates called the little girl——

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

Little Red Riding Hood! Oh, *yes!*

BERTRAM.

Good! Cannot you go on with it?

RED RIDING HOOD.

Oh, no, sir. That is as far as I ever can get. You must make up the rest. But, please, Master Bertram, put some kind deeds in it, also good things to eat!

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

Oh, yes; kind deeds, and good things to eat!

RED RIDING HOOD.

And, Master Bertram, also please put in something terrible!

BERTRAM.

Oh; something terrible, eh?

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

Oh, yes; something terrible! Ugh-ugh!

RED RIDING HOOD.

A savage monster, or a giant, or a spook, I don't care what, so long as it makes your hair stand on end, and sends cold shivers down your spine! [*The other CHILDREN hug themselves, delighted, assenting to this.*]

RED RIDING HOOD.

And then, just as you think somebody or everybody is going to be killed, everybody or somebody must jump in and rescue somebody or everybody! All except the

wicked person. And then they must marry . . . the nice people, that is, and have two beautiful children——

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

And then they must all live happily forever after! Ah-h-h! Now, begin!

BERTRAM.

It has to begin long before little Red Riding Hood ever had a birthday. It has to begin: Once upon a time when there were no houses, no cottages, even. No schoolmasters, schoolhouses, constables and lock-ups! No catechism.

THE CHILDREN.

Oh, how nice!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Prehistoric times.

PARSON.

The Dark Ages!

CONSTABLE.

Chaos!

BERTRAM.

At that time there lived a family who were in the habit of walking on their hands as well as their feet. Four-footed folk.

SCHOOLMASTER.

Why not quadrupeds?

BERTRAM.

Too easy. The children prefer four-footed because it's harder. Eh, children?

THE CHILDREN.

Oh, yes, Master Bertram! Do go on.

BERTRAM.

This family had fine fur coats of which they were so proud that they wore them all the time!

MARGERY DAW.

That's like Tulipina Meggs and her ear-rings. Mother says she is a proud peat, and as vain as vain!

TOM THUMB.

Did they wear their fur coats in bed, too?

BERTRAM.

Day and night, summer and winter, all the time. Only in summer they dyed their coats gray or brown so that they might match the rocks, or the bark of trees, in order that their enemies might not spy them readily, while in winter for the same reason they had them made a dazzling white, like snow!

THE CHILDREN.

How lovely!

GOODY TWO SHOES.

How many children were there in that family?

BERTRAM.

Oh, a great many. But we are most interested in four brothers of the tribe.

JOHNNY JUMP-UP.

What were their names?

BERTRAM.

What they called one another I do not know. Men since have labeled them.

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Interrupting.*] Canidæ. I get your meaning, Canidæ.

BERTRAM.

Which means, the dog family. Mr. and Mrs. Dog, their children, and all their relatives.

THE CHILDREN.

[*Delighted.*] Oh, dogs!

TOM THUMB.

Were they like Spot?

BERTRAM.

As like Spot as you are like your great-great-great-great-grandfather, who wore sheepskin instead of homespun, and, though he had very good manners for his time, never saw a fork in all his life, but carried his meat to his mouth with fingers!

THE CHILDREN.

[*Laugh.*] Oh! . . . But go on with the story. About the four brothers.

BERTRAM.

These four resembled one another closely, in appearance. But in character they were quite unlike. When they grew up they went and lived in places apart one from another, and adopted different customs, ate different food. And their children were even more unlike. But all the cousins retained some family resemblances, for example in their toes and teeth.

SCHOOLMASTER.

Correctly stated. The dental formula for canidæ is—

THE CHILDREN.

Please keep still!

BERTRAM.

All the cousins are meat-eaters.

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Nods.*] Carnivora!

CONSTABLE.

[*Deeply interested in the tale.*] Odds bobs, man; can't you hold your whisht?

BERTRAM.

And all go hunting, following their noses!

THE CHILDREN.

Just like Spot! Eh, Spot?

BERTRAM.

One cousin is a coward who never takes a dangerous chance: the jackal.

SCHOOLMASTER.

Canis aureus. Habitat——

PARSON.

[*Deeply interested in the tale.*] I beg you, do not interrupt.

BERTRAM.

Another cousin, a handsome fellow, is a politician, not above petty tricks. But he takes brave risks, and man has to match wits against wits, to run him down and carry off the brush of Maître Renard.

SCHOOLMASTER.

Vulpine branch of the canidæ.

CONSTABLE.

Fiddlestrings. He means a fox!

THE CHILDREN.

[*Delighted.*] Yes, yes, a fox!

TOM THUMB.

A fox once got into our hen-house, and ate our gray hen's eggs. Ate them raw!

MARGERY DAW.

Of course he takes them raw, silly. A fox couldn't make an omelette, could he, Master Bertram?

BERTRAM.

True, but he generally takes his eggs poached or scrambled.

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Taken off his guard.*] Oh, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! [*As suddenly stops, realizing that the CHILDREN are staring at him, and nudging one another in amazement.*] Ahem, hem, hem!

BERTRAM.

But to come back to our other cousins. The third cast in his lot with men and women, boys and girls, and became their household companion, their close friend.

THE CHILDREN.

That's the dog. That is Spot! Eh, old Spot?

BERTRAM.

From living with them, rather than with his own relations, he became something like them, like human beings! Children, like you!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Lazy!

CONSTABLE.

Lawless.

PARSON.

Occasionally prone to ungodliness!

BERTRAM.

Like human grown-ups. Like our friends here!

THE THREE.

Aha! That's another matter!

BERTRAM.

In a word, like all human children, great or small: faulty, no doubt, but with the noblest virtues. The truest friend! [*The CHILDREN assent, eagerly.*] Faithful to the death. In a word, a dog!

THE CHILDREN.

Oh, yes. A dog, like Spot!

CONSTABLE.

[*Who has been dozing, awakens.*] Speaking of dogs, that Spot of yours ought to be muzzled, Master Bertram. [*BERTRAM and the CHILDREN exclaim, "Muzzled?"*] It's done in all civilized communities, I am told! It's nothing disagreeable. You only put the creature's teeth in a cage. You leave him free use of his tail!

BERTRAM.

The day you put the dog's teeth inside a cage you deliver the children over to the fourth cousin, the enemy!

THE CHILDREN.

[*Hugging themselves, delightedly.*] Oh, now for the

fourth cousin, the enemy! Now for the cold shivers!
Br-r-r!

JOHNNY JUMP-UP.

What does he look like, Master Bertram, that enemy fourth cousin?

MASTER BERTRAM.

Uncommonly like a friend. You might be deceived. But the dog knows; the dog will warn you, lay down his life to protect you!

RED RIDING HOOD.

I wonder if he looks like the fuzzy gentleman I saw walking in the wood yesterday?

OTHER CHILDREN.

I saw him, too, the fuzzy gentleman!

BERTRAM.

[*Suddenly alert.*] What's that? What about this fuzzy gentleman?

TOM THUMB.

He wore a fine dark coat with white around the edges.

CONSTABLE.

[*Striking the ground with staff.*] A King's Messenger! Odds bobs, man, a King's Messenger, bringing me a decoration!

RED RIDING HOOD.

It was too dark to see his face. But I think he had a

cold, for he kept his coat on, though it was quite warm, and he sniffed, oh, so hard!

MARGERY DAW.

Yes, I'm sure he had a cold. He began to speak in a deep, bass voice, but he had a frog in his throat! Um-m-m!

PARSON.

Some noted fellow-divine, no doubt, wishing to exchange pulpits with me!

SILVER LOCKS.

I saw him, quite close. But I thought his coat looked like sheepskin. I think he must be very fond of children, for when he saw us he smiled, oh, such a smile! Indeed, he looked for all the world like a sheep with a fine new set of teeth!

SCHOOLMASTER.

A sheepskin! Sounds like some distinguished educator! Possibly bringing me an academic honor!

GOODY TWO SHOES.

He was coming toward us, as if he wanted to ask the way. But I think he can't like dogs, for just then Spot barked in the distance, and he turned and walked off quite hastily!

BERTRAM.

[*Rising, excited.*] It is, it is!

THE CHILDREN.

Oh, Master Bertram, finish the story!

BERTRAM.

Another time! Another time! By the sun it must be time for school! [*School-bell rings.*] There you are now!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Come, my scholars, to your beloved tasks!

THE CHILDREN.

[*Gathering up books, etc.*] Oh, dear! Just as we were getting to the exciting part!

RED RIDING HOOD.

[*Suddenly pauses.*] Listen!

THE OTHER CHILDREN.

[*Listening, hear something.*] Yes! There he is now! . . . Spot hears him! [*A hoarse, deep bark is heard in the distance, SPOT barks reply.*]

BERTRAM.

[*Reaching for his gun which he had placed against a tree.*] It is himself!

THE CHILDREN.

Oh, Master Bertram, please tell us his name?

RED RIDING HOOD.

The name of the fourth cousin?

SILVER LOCKS.

The cold shivers one, you know!

TOM THUMB.

The enemy!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Canidæ. Lupus.

BERTRAM.

Commonly called the wolf!

THE CHILDREN.

Oh! The wolf!

BERTRAM.

The wolf! Come, get you all to school! Hodge, guard the path! Come, Spot! [*Whistles to SPOT, and followed by him, goes hastily into the forest. The school-bell rings again.*]

HODGE.

[*Shooing the CHILDREN.*] Off with you! [*The CHILDREN go, protesting. HODGE patrols the path. CONSTABLE, PARSON and SCHOOLMASTER exchange derisive glances.*]

ALL THREE.

[*Sneering.*] The wolf.

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Goes toward school-house.*] Extinct!

CONSTABLE.

Exterminated! [*Goes toward village.*]

PARSON.

Exorcised! [*Also goes toward village.*]

THE WOLF.

[*Enters stealthily from the forest, pauses, looks about.*] Just the spot for a picnic! A brook near by, to quench one's thirst. A shady dell, for an after-dinner nap! But where to find the dinner? Not a child in sight! Not even a baby left in its carriage! And I so hungry I could eat even a baby-carriage! What an inhospitable neighborhood! [*Lies on back, rolls over and over.*]
SCHOOLMASTER, CONSTABLE and PARSON, all return, somewhat stealthily and sheepishly.]

ALL THREE.

Ahem!

WOLF.

[*Pauses in his athletic exercises.*] What's this I smell approaching? Dinner? [*Surveys the THREE.*] Um-m. The fat constable isn't so bad, but the others! [*Shakes head.*] The learned professions are apt to be too tough and stringy!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Of course there's no such thing——

CONSTABLE.

As such a thing——

PARSON.

As any such thing! True. But, all the same we live restricted lives here. And, though I try to keep abreast of the times, yet——! [*Shakes head.*]

CONSTABLE.

Odds bobs, man! Suppose there should be such a thing as a wolf, after all!

SCHOOLMASTER.

That's it! If only some traveler ever passed this way! Someone from the outside whom one could ask!

PARSON.

Precisely! But no one comes! No one! [*Pacing about, nearly stumbles over WOLF, who is again rolling over and over.*] Who's this? A thousand pardons, sir!

WOLF.

[*Rising.*] Don't mention it, Doctor! It is my custom always to limber out my muscles before dining!

PARSON.

An athlete, I take it. And a traveler?

WOLF.

Oh, I cover a good deal of ground, I own. I'm a quick walker, when pressed! [*About to go.*]

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Intercepting him.*] A stranger, surely! I don't recall your face?

WOLF.

Modesty, my boy! [*Pokes SCHOOLMASTER hard in ribs.*] I simply run away from the photographer! I detest the taste of chemicals with my food! [*Again starts to go.*]

CONSTABLE.

Evidently a personage! Odds bobs, we mustn't let him go! Hey, sir! [*Addressing WOLF.*]

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Addressing WOLF.*] Professor!

PARSON.

Doctor!

CONSTABLE.

My Lord!

ALL THREE.

[*Checking WOLF's attempted departure.*] You are the very person we have been watching for!

WOLF.

Good gracious, how embarrassing! I may yet be recognized!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Some very strange things have to-day happened in this forest! My handkerchief disappeared from my pocket!

WOLF.

[*Slily drawing SCHOOLMASTER's handkerchief from his pocket.*] You don't say so!

CONSTABLE.

My leg was pinched, my staff clipped from my hand! . . . Ouch!

WOLF.

Incredible! [*Pinches* CONSTABLE'S leg, and snatches his staff.]

PARSON.

And my hat brushed on my head, then off it, as by an unseen broom!

WOLF.

[*Suiting action to word.*] This way? Miraculous! Simply miraculous! But I really must be going! I have a dinner engagement!

CONSTABLE.

Perhaps, sir, you'd come home with me and take pot-luck?

WOLF.

[*Struck with the idea.*] Eh? Pot-luck?

CONSTABLE.

True, we're only plain folk!

WOLF.

[*Paws on* CONSTABLE'S shoulders.] Plain. But generously proportioned. Constable, you are a man after my own taste! [*CONSTABLE smirks, flattered.*] As Shakespeare's Julius Cæsar puts it, Let me have men inside

me that are fat! About me, I should have said! You have perhaps a fat wife and fat children?

CONSTABLE.

Well, sir, Debby tips the scale at a handsome figure. As for the twins——

WOLF.

[*Smacks lips.*] Twins!

CONSTABLE.

Perhaps you're a family man yourself, sir?

WOLF.

If you knew how true that guess is! If you could compute how many families I have assimilated! . . . And so you have twins! Plump pets!

CONSTABLE.

Chips of the old block, as you might say! Then, the house is small, but we could make you comfortable for the night with a shake-down in the lock-up!

WOLF.

[*Edging away from* CONSTABLE.] The lock-up! A cage with bars!

CONSTABLE.

Why, Squire, 'tis never used! We have no malefactors here, worse luck!

WOLF.

I like not places that savor of restraint! The lock-up! What a turn that gave me!

PARSON.

You will visit the church, sir? A fine old bit of Norman architecture.

WOLF.

[*Paws about PARSON'S shoulders.*] Cold stone! I ask for meat, and you offer me a stone! Why not the Sunday school? The infant class?

PARSON.

[*Pleased.*] It will be my pride to show it to you, when in session. Meanwhile, if you are anything of an antiquarian, on the church door is a wolf-skin——!

WOLF.

[*Walks away a few steps.*] Eh? Horrible! Such execrable taste! A wolf-skin, indeed!

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*To the other two.*] You've offended him! . . . Oh, Professor! You won't go without looking in on the school? [*Points schoolwards.*] This is a great place for children!

WOLF.

[*Links paw in SCHOOLMASTER'S arm.*] Children! Children are my weakness! I always take in the children! [*Stops suddenly, seeing HODGE.*] But, what creature is that, armed with gun and hunting-knife?

CONSTABLE.

It's only Hodge, assistant ranger! Bless you, Squire, he wouldn't hurt a fly, Hodge wouldn't!

WOLF.

I do not object to Hodge's hurting flies . . . hexapods, you call them, you learned chap, you! [*Pokes SCHOOLMASTER in ribs.*] But how about Hodge's hurting the four-footed race? The quadruped? I ask because I myself am a naturalist! [*The OTHERS exclaim, "A naturalist!"*] I am in the habit of preying on all fours!

PARSON.

How odd! In these parts men pray on their bended knees!

WOLF.

Doctor, believe me, I would prey on your bended knees, anybody's knees, at the fitting time! But never in public! Alone! Alone! [*About to go.*]

PARSON.

What an exalted character! [*The OTHERS assent.*] But about the wolf——

SCHOOLMASTER.

He'll laugh at us! A man of his education!

CONSTABLE.

A family man, at that!

PARSON.

Even so, let us not fear enlightenment! Let us know it, if there really is a wolf in the forest! . . . Sir . . . Doctor!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Professor!

CONSTABLE.

My lord! Bertram . . . that's our ranger, with his dog Spot. . . . He insists that there's peril in this forest!

WOLF.

Peril? To whom, or what?

SCHOOLMASTER.

A surviving specimen of the extinct *canidæ, lupus*.

WOLF.

Canny-loup! Cantaloup! There is no danger, if you eat it ripe! Only when green!

PARSON.

[*Detaining* WOLF.] Nay, sir! A wolf! A common wolf! That is, if you can call common anything so uncommon as a wolf! Surely, if one there be, you would have seen him in your researches! [*The OTHERS assent.*]

WOLF.

[*Scratches head, as if perplexed.*] A wolf! Let me think! Would you know one, should you see one?

SCHOOLMASTER.

Surely! By the dental formula!

PARSON,

By the character!

CONSTABLE.

By the picture-books!

WOLF.

Dear, dear! Good souls, I tremble for you, so easily you could be imposed on! But, rest assured! My word on it, I have not met with a wolf in your forest!

THE THREE.

[*Triumphantly.*] There! What did I say? I told you so! Extinct! Exterminated! Exorcised! [*They crowd about the WOLF, shaking hands with him.*] Thank you! Thank you!

WOLF.

Don't mention it! Excuse my glove! Bye, bye! [*Trying to get away. SPOT is suddenly heard, in the distance, barking.*] What's that?

CONSTABLE.

It's Bertram's Spot! He ought to be muzzled! Scaring travelers from our village!

PARSON.

A perfect pagan. Accompanies his master to church, but sleeps during the sermon, rising, stretching, and yawning regularly at Fourteenthly!

SCHOOLMASTER.

A creature that plays with children, but that absolutely resists the higher education!

WOLF.

Dear, dear! We'll remedy that! . . . The nosey brute! [*To himself.*] I'll settle him! . . . Let me think! [*Puts paw to brow, considering.*] I have it! Down, down on all fours, all three of you, and bark a hoarse, deep bark, and you'll soon have Spot in your power! [*The THREE obey.*] Bark! Harder! Deeper! Louder! Like a wolf! Come, [*prodding them with staff*] boys that can bark and won't bark must be made to bark! Bow-wow-wow! Keep it up! Bow-wow! . . . Now if only I can make my little get-away! . . . [*Seizes PARSON'S hat and SCHOOLMASTER'S handkerchief, and is about to run off, but bumps into HODGE who comes running.*]

HODGE.

[*Shouting.*] The wolf! The wolf! I beg pardon, sir, but have you seen the wolf?

WOLF.

I have not! But there are three strikingly poor imitations! [*Pointing.*] Keep it up, boys! Bow-wow! [*Runs off, just as BERTRAM and SPOT come, running.*] Excuse haste! [*To HODGE.*] But I have to catch a train, a lady's train!

BERTRAM.

What is this disturbance! [*Sees the THREE.*] Well,

of all the foolish performances . . . ! [CHILDREN *come running from school.*]

CHILDREN.

[*Excited.*] Oh, is there a wolf? Where's the wolf? [SCHOOLMASTER *rises, and with great dignity, points toward the school-house. Follows the CHILDREN off. CONSTABLE and PARSON, also rise with dignity, and go, silently, toward the village. HODGE, crestfallen, resumes his sentinel duty. BERTRAM whistles to SPOT and goes off again.*]

RED RIDING HOOD'S MOTHER.

[*Coming from village, calls.*] Daughter! Daugh-ter! Little Red Riding Hood! Bless me, where is that child!

TULIPINA MEGGS.

[*Very fine, saunters by.*] Good day, Mrs. Gurton! Have you heard the news?

MOTHER.

[*Setting down a basket which she carries.*] Now, Tulipina Meggs, this is baking and churning day, and I haven't time to gossip! . . . Daugh-ter!

TULIPINA.

Gossip, indeed! Oh, very well! It's your loss, not to know! But I met the handsomest gentleman in a fur coat.

MOTHER.

In a fur coat! This weather! [*Wipes face with apron.*] A likely story!

TULIPINA.

He said his family always wore their furs all summer, to protect them from the moths! [*Sits on log, adjusts finery.*] So there! And he told me a secret, he did!

MOTHER.

Much of a secret if you know it, Tulipina! Daughter! Little Red Riding Hood!

RED RIDING HOOD.

[*Coming from school.*] Mother! Here I am!

MOTHER.

Is it all right, child? Did the master give you the half-holiday?

RED RIDING HOOD.

Oh, yes, Mother! He said, all right, being my birthday, and to do a kind deed!

MOTHER.

Good! Then take your granny this basket. Just a fresh loaf, baked on the wood-ashes, and a pat of butter, yellow as cowslips, and as sweet!

TULIPINA.

[*Sniffing enviously.*] Fresh bread and butter!

MOTHER.

And a wee jar of honey, honey the bees took from the gillyflowers and clover.

TULIPINA.

Honey! How I love honey.

MOTHER.

And—poor old granny has only one tooth, but that's a sweet tooth. Here are some little cakes.

TULIPINA.

Little cakes. How I dote on little cakes!

RED RIDING HOOD.

Granny always likes to see my new red cloak and hood.

MOTHER.

[*Smiles.*] Not to speak of the lass that wears them! Don't spill things, child!

RED RIDING HOOD.

I'll be very careful. Mother, may I gather granny some flowers?

MOTHER.

Surely! [*Turns to go, then returns.*] Oh; I shouldn't like Parson to know it, but at the bottom of the basket I put a rabbit's foot for luck!

TULIPINA.

A rabbit's foot! I need luck, myself!

MOTHER.

[*Goes, then returns.*] You know the way. Eh, child?

RED RIDING HOOD.

Know the way? Why, Mother, I have been hundreds and hundreds of times, alone!

MOTHER.

True! Still—— Well, good-bye, dear! [*Goes, turns then returns.*] Give my love to granny. And don't stay after dark.

RED RIDING HOOD.

[*Picking flowers.*] Very well, Mother.

MOTHER.

[*Goes, then returns.*] You don't feel timid, do you, Daughter?

RED RIDING HOOD.

Timid? Mother! What is there to fear, in our dear forest?

TULIPINA.

[*To herself.*] Aha! They don't know what I know!

MOTHER.

True. It is as safe as our own fireside! All the same . . . If you should fall in with a stranger, Daughter, do not speak to any stranger!

RED RIDING HOOD.

[*Pauses in flower-picking.*] How should I know a stranger, Mother? I never have seen one!

MOTHER.

Neither have I, for that matter. Everyone about here is a neighbor, or a relation, or a friend.

TULIPINA.

[*To herself.*] I know what a stranger looks like. He wears a fine fur coat!

MOTHER.

I'll tell you. Anyone that doesn't know you is a stranger!

RED RIDING HOOD.

I shall not forget! Good-bye, Mother!

MOTHER.

[*Going.*] Good-bye, child!

TULIPINA.

Bread, butter, honey, little cakes, and a rabbit's foot for luck! Just what I'd like, myself!

WOLF.

[*Appears, sniffing.*] A nice little pink-and-white, plump maid! Just what I fancy for a late dinner, or early supper! Now if only I can get her alone. . . . ! [*Runs away, as HODGE advances, marching to and fro.*] That odious man with fire-arms! There ought to be a law against carrying such weapons!

TULIPINA.

Well, Hodge. Have you heard the latest news?

HODGE.

[*Pausing.*] Have you heard the latest news, yourself, Tulipina Meggs? Tell me, what will you give me for a brand-new wolf-skin coat for Xmas, eh?

TULIPINA.

[*Smirking.*] I'll give you a kiss!

HODGE.

A kiss! Ho, ho, ho! When your cross face curdles the milk and sours the dough, just by looking at it! A kiss, ho, ho!

TULIPINA.

[*Suiting the action to the word.*] Then a box on the ear, you impertinent jackanapes! [HODGE *cries out, and marches off.* TULIPINA *approaches* RED RIDING HOOD.] Little Red Riding Hood, don't you want me to carry that basket to your granny's?

RED RIDING HOOD.

Why should you, Tulipina?

TULIPINA.

Because . . . it's a secret. I met a gentleman who told me. There's a wolf in the forest!

RED RIDING HOOD.

[*Dropping her flowers.*] A wolf . . . in our forest?

TULIPINA.

[*Nods, corroborating.*] A gentleman in a fur coat

told me! There he is now! [*The WOLF advances, wearing the PARSON'S hat, flourishing the CONSTABLE'S staff, and holding the SCHOOLMASTER'S handkerchief to his face.*]

RED RIDING HOOD.

Who? The wolf?

TULIPINA.

Nonsense! The gentleman who told me about the wolf! In a fur coat!

RED RIDING HOOD.

Oh, I see!

WOLF.

[*Bowing jauntily.*] Ha, ladies! The top of the morning to you!

TULIPINA.

The end of the day to yourself, sir! [*Nudges RED RIDING HOOD.*] Charming manners!

RED RIDING HOOD.

But he is not truthful! It is afternoon! Unless he comes from the other side of the world, where days and nights are back to front, and seasons upside down!

WOLF.

You are gathering flowers, I see!

RED RIDING HOOD.

They are for my granny.

WOLF.

Happy granny!

TULIPINA.

You well may say so. She gets all the good things!

WOLF.

Perhaps you will allow me to accompany you to your granny's? Dear old soul, perhaps I can put an end to her infirmities!

RED RIDING HOOD.

You are very kind, sir, but I am not sure that I may speak to you. I promised my mother I would not speak with any stranger!

WOLF.

I a stranger? Child, I am a household word! Particularly among the poor! Never a poor but honest person who does not expect to see me some day at his door!

RED RIDING HOOD.

Poor but honest! Oh, then you know my parents! That's good. But I can not see your face! Have you the toothache?

WOLF.

[*Hiding face in handkerchief.*] Alas, yes! My teeth always ache when they need exercise! Something solid to crunch on!

RED RIDING HOOD.

I fear that is not wise! When granny has toothache she has to eat baby food!

WOLF.

Baby food! My own *ménu*, to a T! Never anything beyond juvenile, if I can avoid it! Oh, youth! Tender youth! There's nothing like it!

TULIPINA.

What a lovely talker!

WOLF.

Youth, tender youth! Once, when shipwrecked on a desert island, when the last child, the last doll, even—nay, the last kid glove, had all been despatched, I ate a baby-grand piano for breakfast!

TULIPINA.

[*Incredulous.*] You ate a baby-grand piano?

WOLF.

Unfortunately, too true! It matured, in process of digestion, and created as much disturbance as a concert-grand, in my interior! Tum-te-tum!

TULIPINA.

Te-hee! Isn't he witty?

RED RIDING HOOD.

[*Still picking flowers.*] I do not know what witty

means. But I do not think he is truthful. And I am sure he is a stranger!

HODGE.

[*Marches to and fro, importantly.*] Beware the wolf!
A wolf in the forest! Beware the wolf!

WOLF.

Dear, dear, this annoying publicity! And my appetite still unsatisfied!

HODGE.

[*Catching sight of WOLF, approaches him.*] Beg pardon, sir—— [*Saluting.*]

WOLF.

[*Starts, alarmed.*] Get away from me! How dare you approach me, with that gun in your hand!

HODGE.

Why, bless you, sir, it isn't loaded! It's just to scare the wolf!

WOLF.

All guns are loaded! As for scaring the wolf . . . [*Takes gun from HODGE.*] Now, what did you wish to say to me?

HODGE.

Why, sir, I just felt it my duty to warn you: there's a wolf somewhere about!

WOLF.

Go to! Go to, my worthy Hodge! It is I myself who am responsible for that piece of news! [*Gives HODGE a playful poke that sends him sprawling.*]

TULIPINA.

[*Laughs, mocking HODGE, who picks himself up, crest-fallen.*] Didn't I tell you so? [*Approaches WOLF, who is engaged in breaking the gun.*] Sir, a word with you!

WOLF.

[*Throwing aside the pieces of the gun.*] What is it, my charmer? [*Arm about TULIPINA, takes a few dancing steps.*]

TULIPINA.

Tell me, sir: about the wolf . . . what does it look like? If one only knew it would be easier to be on one's guard!

WOLF.

I'll tell you. Walk away a few steps, and close your eyes, and for the once I will act the part of wolf!

TULIPINA.

[*Excited and pleased.*] Oh, what fun! [*Obeys. The WOLF snarls, and rushes at her on all fours. She, really frightened, runs away, into the forest, shrieking.*] Oh, the wolf, the wolf, the wolf!

HODGE.

[Runs about, wildly, always in the wrong direction.]
The wolf! The wolf! Show me the wolf!

RED RIDING HOOD.

[Rises, picks up basket, takes flowers.] If there really is a wolf abroad I must go look after granny! *[Walks into the forest as the CURTAIN falls.]*

ACT II

A room in a wee cottage. Everything is spick and span. There is a curtained recess at one side. Hearth-fire. Spinning-wheel. GRANNY, in nightcap and dressing-gown, is abed, propped up with pillows, at work on a child's white dress. Beside her, on a small table is a tea-cup, also an open book.

GRANNY.

[*Crooning a little song, pauses.*] By the sun 'tis time the child should be tapping on the door! Here have I set the last stitch in her new frock! Each year a little white frock longer and whiter than the year before! [*Tap on door.*] Eh? Someone, but not she! Not my little Red Riding Hood! [*Removes spectacles.*]

TULIPINA.

[*Outside, tapping.*] Oh, Gammer Gurton, let me in!

GRANNY.

That proud peat, Tulipina Meggs, with her ear-rings and her gossip!

TULIPINA.

Let me in! Let me in!

GRANNY.

Ah, well! Pull the bobbin! Pull the bobbin! And the latch will fly up, you'll see!

TULIPINA.

[*Obeys, enters, breathless.*] Oh, such an adventure! Oh, Gammer, had you been in my shoes! But, first, the news! [*Sinks into a chair.*] I have a piece of news!

GRANNY.

News? Now, don't tell me anything has happened to the weathercock on the church steeple! When they put it in thorough repair fifty years ago from Candlemas!

TULIPINA.

The church steeple, indeed! Much more exciting!

GRANNY.

Somebody's haycock afire? That comes of being disrespectful to the Good People! Oh, it's not like my young days when folk bragged of having seen Mother Goose in person, and didn't begrudge bite or sip to merry Robin Goodfellow, bless him! And above all, never failed to leave fairy-rings alone! But times will change, and farmers have only themselves to blame when crops fail and wells run dry and haycocks burn!

TULIPINA.

I tell you, it's nothing of that sort! Listen! [*Impressively.*] There's a wolf in the forest!

GRANNY.

A wolf . . . in the forest?

TULIPINA.

That's what there is!

GRANNY.

Now, now, Tulipina; don't try to impose on an old woman who hasn't left her bed for twenty years!

TULIPINA.

But, I tell you, I met a gentleman, a great traveler, who told me so!

GRANNY.

Misdoubt travelers' tales, my girl! Oh, I won't say there's no truth in it when sailor lads tell you of countries where the mountains are all barley-sugar, and the rivers run currant wine, and the lakes are big bowls of goose-berry-fool! But, a wolf? Why, the last one was killed, by the King's command, over a hundred years since, and his skin nailed to the church door! I'm afraid you don't go to church, Tulipina Meggs! A wolf in our dear forest!

TULIPINA.

But the gentleman knew it for a fact! And he showed me just what the wolf looked like, and how it would act! He snapped and yapped and snarled and barked, and chased me, so that for the moment I felt as if it were real, and I was so scared that I shrieked and ran and

ran, and never stopped running till I reached your door!
Ah-h!

GRANNY.

I'm afraid he was just a play-acting gentleman! [*Goes on with work, then suddenly pauses.*] Yet I have read here, in the Complete Fairy Book, about men who had been changed into wolves! Why shouldn't wolves be changed into men?

TULIPINA.

Oh, come now, Gammer, you're behind the times! He's the pleasantest-spoken gentleman in furs from head to foot, to protect them from the moths, he says.

GRANNY.

Very suspicious!

TULIPINA.

And the schoolmaster, and the constable, and the parson are all daffy about him.

GRANNY.

[*Reassured.*] Ah, well; that's another matter! But about the wolf——?

TULIPINA.

I tell you, Hodge is on guard near the school-house, and Master Bertram has gone off with Spot, hunting for him in the forest!

GRANNY.

[*Again alarmed.*] Bertram the ranger . . . and

Spot! Bertram goes by Spot, and Spot follows his nose, and the Good People guide Spot! Tulipina, why didn't you tell me that at first? A wolf abroad, and my grandchild, my little Red Riding Hood on her way to me, alone! [*Head out of window.*] Bertram! Master Bertram! Ho! Spot! [*Clapping hands.*]

TULIPINA.

They're beyond earshot, by this time!

GRANNY.

Tulipina, couldn't you go after them, and call them back?

TULIPINA.

I? Why, Gammer, I have only just got here myself, in safety! Besides, Red Riding Hood has a rabbit's foot in her basket!

GRANNY.

A rabbit's foot? A fine thing for rheumatics, but useless as a charm against a hungry wolf! Heaven, hear me! Oh, my strength! Where is my strength? [*Trying to rise.*] Oh, if only I could walk! If only I were not a poor, helpless old woman! O Good People, help me!

TULIPINA.

Gammer, what are you trying to do?

GRANNY.

I'm going to save my little one!

TULIPINA.

But the wolf will only eat you up, too!

GRANNY.

If only he might eat me, and spare the child! But he wouldn't touch old bones with young flesh within scent! No, no! The thing is to find Bertram, Spot! Help me, O Good People! [*With great effort, rises, and, supporting herself by furniture and wall, goes into the curtained recess.*]

TULIPINA.

[*Amazed.*] Well, I never! I need a cup of tea! [*Begins to drink.*]

WOLF.

[*Head in at window.*] Is anyone at home?

TULIPINA.

[*Dropping spoon.*] What's that? [*WOLF disappears, GRANNY, in cloak and bonnet, comes forth, hobbling, leaning on staff, and goes toward the back door.*]

GRANNY.

Help me, O Good People! . . . Bertram! What, ho! Spot! [*Goes out, closing door.*]

TULIPINA.

Such a fuss about nothing! The child has a rabbit's foot! [*About to drink, has an inspiration. Sets down cup.*] I'll get that rabbit's foot, myself! [*Goes into curtained recess.*]

WOLF.

[*Head in at window, in deep voice.*] Is anyone at home? My voice is too rough! I must eat the stick of chalk I stole from the schoolmaster! [*Eats chalk.*] Now, perhaps I can make my voice sound like a little girl's! [*Disappears, as TULIPINA is heard, laughing.*]

TULIPINA.

[*Comes out in cap, dressing-gown, and puts on spectacles.*] Ha, ha, ha! Now if only I can make my voice sound like Granny's, the room is so dark the child will never know the difference, and I shall get, not only the rabbit's foot, but the bread, butter, honey, and little cakes, as well! [*Gets into bed. WOLF knocks.*] Who's there? [*Imitating an old woman.*]

WOLF.

[*Imitating a child.*] Can't you guess?

TULIPINA.

[*Imitating an old woman.*] You're a wolf! Ha, ha!

WOLF.

[*In deep voice, taken off guard.*] Nothing of the sort!

TULIPINA.

[*Alarmed, taken off guard.*] Eh? What did you say?

WOLF.

[*Squeaking.*] I'm your dear little grandchild!

TULIPINA.

[*Squeaking.*] What, dear little Red Riding Hood?

WOLF.

The same, dear Granny! I bring you something, oh, so nice! Let me in!

TULIPINA.

[*To herself.*] Ha, ha! Now I get the dainties, and the charm! . . . Pull the bobbin! Pull the bobbin, and the latch will fly up, my dear! [*The WOLF obeys, and rushes in snarling, barking, howling and yapping. TULIPINA shrieks, jumps out of bed, and tries to escape; the WOLF chases her round and round the room, and behind the curtains. Her groans are heard, then a sound of crunching. Then the WOLF comes forth, hurriedly putting on cap, dressing-gown, and spectacles, still munching.*]

WOLF.

For a grandmother she is not so tough and stringy! She tasted much more like an aunt! [*Suddenly cries out, and takes from mouth an ear-ring.*] What's this? Have I been deceived? Was it that miserable Tulipina all the time? How I hate imposters! I do believe I have broken a tooth upon her ear-ring! What a despicable sin is vanity! [*Throwing away ear-ring. Gets into bed.*] And now for the sweet, after the sour! Now for dear little Red Riding Hood! [*RED RIDING HOOD taps at door.*] Who's there?

RED RIDING HOOD.

'Tis I, dear Granny!

WOLF.

What, my dear little grandchild, little Red Riding Hood?

RED RIDING HOOD.

Yes, Granny. Little Red Riding Hood!

WOLF.

I've been looking for you, my child! Pull the bobbin! Pull the bobbin, and the latch will fly up, my dear! [RED RIDING HOOD *obeys, comes in.*] Ah, my child. You are late! Many happy returns of the day!

RED RIDING HOOD.

Thank you, dear Granny! Mother sent you this basket. And I have brought you some flowers!

WOLF.

Sweet child! Youth, tender youth! There's nothing like it! Come, kiss me!

RED RIDING HOOD.

[*About to comply.*] Why, Granny! How strange you look!

WOLF.

[*Hiding face in pillow.*] Nonsense, child! Your fancy!

RED RIDING HOOD.

And your voice, how harsh it sounds!

WOLF.

Laryngitis! I mean, a slight cold! Ahem!

RED RIDING HOOD.

And your eyes, behind your spectacles, how large and bright they are!

WOLF.

The better to see you, love!

RED RIDING HOOD.

And your hands . . . they have grown all large and hairy!

WOLF.

The better to hold your hand, my dear! Come, sit beside me! [RED RIDING HOOD, *about to do so, suddenly perceives the truth, and cries out, "Oh, the wolf, the wolf!" just as the WOLF with a savage yelp, is about to spring on her. At the moment voices are heard, approaching. BERTRAM, SPOT and GRANNY rush in. OTHERS are heard, without. The WOLF gives a despairing cry. Darkness falls upon the scene. Soon there is a gradual illumination, and again the CHILDREN are gathered about BERTRAM in the forest clearing, the GROWN-UPS in the background.*]

BERTRAM.

And little Red Riding Hood's granny got better of her rheumatism. And Spot got a new collar for killing the wolf!

CONSTABLE.

And well he deserved it! _Great dog, Spot!

SCHOOLMASTER.

Hear, hear!

PARSON.

Amen!

THE CHILDREN.

Darling Spot!

BERTRAM.

And Tulipina Meggs, though somewhat chewed up, was not entirely spoilt. But after her painful experience she ceased to be a proud peat, and gave her remaining ear-ring to clothe the poor! [TULIPINA *looks up from her knitting with a pleasant smile.*] And Hodge was promoted for his stupidity!

HODGE.

[*Patroling, pauses, salutes.*] Thank you, sir!

BERTRAM.

And thereafter the forest was as safe as anybody's fireside, thanks to——

SCHOOLMASTER.

[*Looks up from book.*] The Good People. Fairies!
[CHILDREN *echo "Fairies!"*]

CONSTABLE.

Robin Goodfellow! Eh, Hodge? [HODGE *guffaws*.
The CHILDREN echo the name.]

PARSON.

My esteemed parishioner Mother . . . er . . . Goose!
[*The CHILDREN echo the name, and, as the light wanes, these shadowy persons are dimly seen, leading a ghostly WOLF.*]

BERTRAM.

And each year the little girl's mother made her a new cloak, longer and redder than the year before, so that her playmates called her——

THE CHILDREN.

Little Red Riding Hood!

BERTRAM.

And then they all——

THE CHILDREN.

They all lived happily forever after!

CURTAIN. END OF THE PLAY.

CINDERELLA

A Fairy-tale Play in two cottage Acts with
Royal Interludes.

PERSONS.

A GOODMAN.

A GOODWIFE, PEPPERCORNELIA, who is not, however, a very good wife.

ELLA, the GOODMAN'S daughter by his first and good wife Ella.

VAINBETTY and SCRATCHCATTY, daughters of PEPPERCORNELIA by a former marriage.

DAME TRULY, ELLA'S godmother.

A LIEUTENANT and a COUNSELOR, admirers of VAINBETTY and SCRATCHCATTY.

NEIGHBORS.

PRINCE AFFABILITY, son and heir of King Pomposity the Twenty-seventh.

THE PRINCE'S GENTLEMEN-IN-WAITING.

A ROYAL HERALD. A WATCHMAN.

COURTIERS, LACKEYS, and GUESTS at the ball.

Also

A SQUIRREL COACHMAN, SQUIRREL LACKEYS, a MAGPIE census-taker, and the voices of DOVES and PIGEONS gifted with speech.

CINDERELLA

ACT I

Living-room in the GOODMAN's cottage. On one side burns a hearth-fire. Beyond this is the entrance to the scullery and between them a window. On the other side are two doors: one opening into the bedroom of the GOODMAN and his wife, the other into the bedroom of the two young ladies. At the rear a door and a casement window open to the outside. Everything is orderly and clean. The supper-table is laid for four. Enter from the outside, the GOODWIFE, as usual in a bad temper. She looks about, then calls:

GOODWIFE.

Cinderella! Where is that kitchen-wench? Crying over her mother's grave as usual, I'll be bound! [*Taking off bonnet and shawl.*] And I worn out with addressing a Goodwives' Gathering on how to bring up children! Really it is enough to provoke a saint! Cinderella! Cinder-el-la!

ELLA.

[*Coming from scullery.*] Here I am, Mother.

GOODWIFE.

How often am I to tell you not to mother me, Miss?

ELLA.

Pardon, Madam; I forgot.

GOODWIFE.

Why isn't supper on the table? I told you sundown would see me back!

ELLA.

I thought you would wait for my father to return from the fair, Madam.

GOODWIFE.

Forget, please, that my husband happens to be your father, and remember only that I am mistress of this house. Serve the food and call my daughters. [*ELLA places the stirabout and the potato-cake, which are warming by the fire, upon the table. VAINBETTY and SCRATCHCATTY are heard in their room, calling her. Then, their toilet incomplete, one after another, they appear.*]

VAINBETTY.

Cinderella! Here, lazybones; come and pin up my hair!

SCRATCHCATTY.

Cendrillon! Aschenpuettel! Come, lace my bodice!

ELLA.

Coming, sister Vainbetty! In a minute, sister Scratchcatty.

THE TWO

Sister! Sis-ter? You kitchen-wench, you!

ELLA.

Pardon, young ladies; I forgot!

GOODWIFE.

Come, come; don't you see that I'm at table?

VAINBETTY.

[*Sinks into chair.*] Oh, very well. But I am expecting the lieutenant.

SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Also sits.*] The counselor is likely to drop in. Here, lace me while I eat! [ELLA *obeys.*] Ouch, you're squeezing me to death, you vixen! [*Slaps ELLA.*] Now don't pretend that hurt!

ELLA.

Why should I pretend? It hurt!

VAINBETTY.

And serves you right! Put these hairpins in, and carefully! Ouch, you're tugging, you wild cat, you! [*Slaps ELLA.*] Now don't pretend that didn't hurt!

ELLA.

[*Sadly.*] It hurt! [*Takes some food from the table, about to place it on hearth.*]

GOODWIFE.

[*Snatching this from her.*] What are you about? Filching the pick of the food for your own greed?

ELLA.

Madam—indeed—it's for my father—for the good-man, I mean. You see I promised—— [*Breaks off.*]

GOODWIFE.

Promised? Whom? Promised what? Out with it, or I'll whip it out of you!

ELLA.

[*Diffidently.*] When God took her to Himself I promised my dear mother that I would try always to be good and pious, and would look after my dear father. I meant no harm! [*Breaks off, weeping, and runs into scullery.*]

GOODWIFE.

The trouble is, you haven't enough to do. Here. [*Takes shovelful of cinders from hearth, and empties this out of side window.*] Sift those cinders!

ELLA.

[*Brokenly, in scullery.*] I will obey you, Madam.

GOODWIFE.

[*Returns to table.*] It's the last time I will marry a man with a daughter. As I said in my speech at the Goodwives' Gathering, children should be brought up,

and step-children should be taken down. How they applauded! But this one gives not the slightest excuse for discipline! It is an insult for a step-daughter to be as willing and obedient as this one!

VAINBETTY.

She's tidy, too. Or she would be, if I didn't make slits with my scissors in her clothes!

SCRATCHCATTY.

And she is so stupidly clean she keeps me busy smutting up her rags with ashes.

GOODWIFE.

And good-looking! She would make you two look like caricatures if she were to suspect what a beauty she is! [*Sighs.*]

THE TWO.

[*Alarmed.*] For mercy's sake don't let her suspect it! [*There is a knock at the door. All exclaim, "Who's that?"*]

VAINBETTY.

It's not the lieutenant! You can always tell by the squeak of his boots and his waxed mustache.

SCRATCHCATTY.

Nor the Counselor, he always sniffs and his bones creak with rheumatism. I tell you, it's old Dame Truly. I can hear her stick.

VAINBETTY.

That old bore, with her sharp eyes and sharper tongue.
Don't let her in!

GOODWIFE.

Yes, yes; it won't do to offend her. For all she dresses so shabbily she is so independent in her speech she must have money! [*When the knock is repeated she opens the door.*]

DAME TRULY.

[*Hobbling in.*] Greetings on this household!

ALL.

[*Greet her effusively.*] Dear Dame Truly. What a delightful surprise! [*They place her at table.*]

GOODWIFE.

[*Serving her.*] Forgive our keeping you so long. We waited for our maid to open to you, but—the stupid thing—never on hand when needed!

DAME TRULY.

Ah, then you keep a maid?

THE OTHERS.

Of course we do! Certainly we do! People in our position!

DAME TRULY.

I ask—and indeed that is why I have called! because

a rumor is abroad that your goodman's daughter, little Ella, bears all the brunt of the housework!

THE OTHERS.

What! Darling little Ella! That precious child!

DAME TRULY.

And, speaking of Ella, where is she? [ELLA advances from scullery.]

GOODWIFE.

[Hurriedly.] Visiting her godmother. [Waves ELLA back.]

VAINBETTY.

[Almost at the same time, hurriedly.] At boarding-school!

SCRATCHCATTY.

[Hurriedly, almost at the same time.] Gone with her father to the fair!

DAME TRULY.

Visiting her godmother, at boarding-school, and gone with her father to the fair! It must be hard to keep up with little Ella!

GOODWIFE.

Ah, the young folks are great gadabouts, these days. Let me help you to potato-cake. Just a morsel. Or stir-about. One, wee taste.

DAME TRULY.

No more, though delicious, both. Your maid is a good cook.

GOODWIFE.

That stupid thing? My daughters here are the accomplished ones!

DAME TRULY.

Indeed! What's your recipe for potato-cake? [*To VAINBETTY.*]

VAINBETTY.

Why, you make a potato, and then a cake—I mean you take a potato and a cake—and then you bake a potato and a cake, and—and—then you just go ahead!

DAME TRULY.

Highly original. And stirabout? [*To SCRATCHCATTY.*]

SCRATCHCATTY.

Why, you stir it about—about the kitchen. I mean, about an hour or so. And then you keep on stirring it about until it is stirabout, you know.

DAME TRULY.

Lucidity itself! [*Rises, hobbles to side-window, and looks out.*] That maid of yours, you do not find her satisfactory?

THE OTHERS.

Satisfactory? If you only knew!

DAME TRULY.

What wages do you pay her?

GOODWIFE.

Wages? We give her a home, through charity!

DAME TRULY.

Ah, then she meets with charity here. She finds this a home. And yet she has no claim on you?

GOODWIFE.

None. Not the slightest.

DAME TRULY.

Then she is free to leave you. Then I can take her off your hands! [*Taps on window. Beckons.*] Come hither, child.

GOODWIFE.

Wait, please. After all my kindness I have some claim on her. [*Waves hand and shakes head, to ELLA outside.*]

DAME TRULY.

Couldn't your claim be bought off?

GOODWIFE.

[*Greedily.*] How much would you give?

DAME TRULY.

I should have to ascertain her worth. Call her.

GOODWIFE.

[*Taps on window, calls.*] Cinderella!

VAINBETTY.

Cendrillon!

SCRATCHCATTY.

Aschenbroedel! Aschenpuettel!

DAME TRULY.

She has many names for so small a waif!

GOODWIFE.

My dear girls are studying foreign languages, and this is their playful way of practising them. [*ELLA enters, and stands timidly before them.*]

DAME TRULY.

Strange, she looks like someone I used to know; the daughter of an old schoolmate!

VAINBETTY.

Many people look like other people! I've often noticed it!

DAME TRULY.

Pity that charity can't find her a whole frock, a pretty hair-ribbon.

SCRATCHCATTY.

Wasted on her. She slits and smutties everything!

GOODWIFE.

We do our best, my girls and I, but the wench is stupidity itself!

DAME TRULY.

Odd, but I never yet have come across a stupid child. Stupid parents, guardians, and employers, often. But a stupid child means a child set to a task for which it is not fitted. Let me take this one off your hands.

GOODWIFE.

Oh, if the ingrate wants to go, after all my kindness to her!

VAINBETTY.

Why, she's just a household pet! Eh, Cindy?

SCRATCHCATTY.

She wouldn't leave us for the world, would you, ducky?

DAME TRULY.

Child, answer fearlessly. Are you happy here? [ELLA is silent.]

GOODWIFE.

[*In a passion seizes poker.*] Serpent, tell the lady you are happy as can be, or I'll beat you within an inch of your life!

VAINBETTY AND SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Restraining her.*] Mother, do be careful!

DAME TRULY.

[*To ELLA.*] This is not a prison. Since no ties bind you, the door stands open. And in my heart I promise you a home. Well, will you come?

ELLA.

Dame, I thank you, but I cannot.

DAME TRULY.

Cannot? 'Tis but the act of crossing the threshold. Try.

ELLA.

Madam, I thank you, but I may not.

DAME TRULY.

May not? If you owe no duty who dares forbid? Try.

ELLA.

Madam, I thank you, but I will not.

DAME TRULY.

Will not? How is that? You will not!

ELLA.

I promised—[*Breaks off, weeping, and runs out into scullery.*]

GOODWIFE.

[*Triumphant.*] Well, Dame; are you answered?

DAME TRULY.

I am answered. [*Turns and hobbles out.*]

GOODWIFE.

That was an escape! The old meddler, I doubt if she has a penny, for all her overbearing ways. Here, you, Cinderella, you; come and clear the table.

VAINBETTY.

And quickly. I'm expecting company. The lieutenant!

SCRATCHCATTY.

Be ready to open the door for the counselor, then take your sooty presence out of sight! [*ELLA clears the table, carrying dishes into the scullery.*]

GOODMAN.

[*Laden with bundles enters from without.*] Good evening!

ELLA.

[*Runs to greet him.*] Father! Welcome home, Father! Are you tired and hungry, Father?

GOODWIFE.

[*Interposing.*] Get you gone about your business, kitchen-wench!

GOODMAN.

Come, now, my good Peppercornelia!

GOODWIFE.

Don't you Peppercornelia me. Where are the new clothes you promised me and my daughters?

VAINBETTY AND SCRATCHCATTY.

Yes, where are our new clothes?

GOODWIFE.

That satin gown, and head-dress with feathers. Where are they?

VAINBETTY AND SCRATCHCATTY.

Our silken frocks, dancing shoes with buckles, scarfs, fans, wreaths, gloves and ornaments, where are they?

GOODMAN.

[*Setting down bundles.*] All in good time. Service before silks and satins. I laid in a stock of household utensils! [*The women exclaim, disgusted.*] Here's a new kind of knife—peels potatoes while you look at them. It says so, in the advertisement. [*Displays articles while describing them.*] Babies cry for it!

GOODWIFE.

[*Dashing it from his hand.*] Simpleton.

GOODMAN.

Tut, tut! And here's a new invention. Read the prospectus! "It makes cinder-sifting a drawing-room

accomplishment for the white-handedest of ladies! No happiness in the home without it!" We need it!

GOODWIFE.

Idiot! Give it to your ash-girl Cinderella! [*Throws it at ELLA who has entered from scullery.*] Where are our new clothes?

VAINBETTY AND SCRATCHCATTY.

Where are our new clothes?

GOODMAN.

Softly, now. The inner man before the outer woman. Here's a good investment. A sack of beans! A special brand, the merchant called them. Has-beens.

THE THREE WOMEN.

[*Dash sack from his hand.*] Beans, beans! Fool! Where are our new clothes?

GOODMAN.

Useful before ornamental! Here's a bargain! A prize pumpkin! Such pies as you'll get out of it! And 'twill keep forever. The farmer that sold it to me as a favor told me that it's the oldest and toughest pumpkin on record! What do you say to that!

ELLA.

[*Smothering amusement.*] Father! Oh, you dear Father!

GOODWIFE.

[*Infuriated.*] Fool! Idiot! Nincompoop! Making ducks and drakes of money, that way, when my daughters and I need clothes! What sort of a figure shall I cut at Goodwives' Gatherings with a potato-knife? Answer me that! Can my Vainbetty go walking with the lieutenant clothed in a cinder-sifter, or Scratchcatty attend church with the counselor in a sack of beans? As for your silly pumpkin—[*Dashes the pumpkin to the ground, and kicks it about, her daughters joining in the sport.*]

GOODMAN.

[*Trying to stop them.*] Wife! Peppercornelia! Young women, stop! Well, now, isn't it lucky it is such a tough one, else it never would have withstood such treatment!

GOODWIFE.

[*Sinks into chair, exhausted.*] How come I to be married to such an insect!

GOODMAN.

Come, now; this may cheer you up! [*Tosses a bundle into her lap.*] And you, too, young women; here's your finery! [*Gives them bundles.*] Silly fripperies, to my mind, and far beyond my means, but anything for a quiet life!

GOODWIFE.

At last! [*She and her daughters undo the packages,*

with exclamations of satisfaction, taking out the finery these contain, displaying it, and adorning themselves with it.]

ELLA.

[Brings food and sets this before the GOODMAN.] Here, Father. You must be hungry.

GOODMAN.

Perhaps I am. I noticed a queer sensation inside me, and—— *[Eats.]* Yes, it was hunger. Have you had your supper, Ella?

GOODWIFE.

Oh, be sure she nibbled the choicest morsels while preparing the food.

GOODMAN.

[Starts up from table.] Really, Peppercornelia——

ELLA.

[Pulls him down again.] Sh! *[She goes over to the young women and looks at their finery.]* May I look? Oh, how pretty!

SCRATCHCATTY.

Keep your smutty hands off my things, Miss! *[The child draws back, hurt.]*

GOODMAN.

Here, little one; it's your turn now. You bade me bring you something.

GOODWIFE.

[*Looking up sharply.*] Don't tell me you spent money on that miserable chit.

GOODMAN.

She asked for nothing costing money.

ELLA.

Only the first bough that should brush your hat as you started homeward.

VAINBETTY.

Just like her, the daffy thing!

GOODMAN.

A child's innocent whim. And here it is, dear one. A hazel bough just about as tall as you yourself. [*He gives ELLA a hazel bough.*]

ELLA.

[*Greatly pleased.*] Oh, Father, that is all I cared, that you should remember. Because lately you have seemed—— Forgive me! to forget!

GOODMAN.

[*In undertone.*] For your own sake! Sh! [*Kisses her.*]

ELLA.

[*Moved, also in an undertone.*] I understand. And now I can be happy again.

GOODWIFE.

[*Sharply.*] What's all that whispering about? Complaining of me and my daughters, I'll be bound.

SCRATCHCATTY.

As usual. The cry-baby.

GOODMAN.

The lass never complains, no matter what the provocation.

GOODWIFE.

Oh, then she has provocation, you think? She says that I ill-treat her? [*She rises, and approaches ELLA menacingly.*] I'll teach you to carry tales, Miss.

VAINBETTY.

Little tattle-tale!

GOODMAN.

[*Protesting.*] Peppercornelia, the maid never has been used to harshness.

GOODWIFE.

'Tis time she should taste a dose. You're far too soft with her.

SCRATCHCATTY.

I should say so. She's the worst spoiled child—a perfect *enfant terrible!*

GOODWIFE.

Bring me that hazel switch.

GOODMAN.

You shall not lift a hand against her. Go outside, Ella. [ELLA obeys.]

GOODWIFE.

[*Infuriated.*] You defy me, do you? In my own house, too. Aye, my house. You forget, no doubt, that I made you sign it over to me. Ha, ha! [*Her daughters join in her mocking laughter.*] Cinderella! [*Calls and claps her hands.*] I want you.

VAINBETTY AND SCRATCHCATTY.

Aschenbroedel! Cendrillon! Aschenpuettel! Come, Cinderella! We want you.

GOODWIFE.

And bring that delicate little hazel bough! [ELLA enters, with the bough.] Give it to me! [ELLA obeys, and it is now seen that the bough has mysteriously grown.] What's this? I want the bough your father brought you.

ELLA.

Madam, this is the same.

GOODWIFE.

The same? Tell the truth, Miss.

ELLA.

Madam, that is the truth.

GOODWIFE.

See what a paragon your child is! And you don't think she needs a whipping! Well, it never shall be thrown up at me that I neglected her! [*She cuts the air viciously with the switch.*]

GOODMAN.

[*Snatching the switch.*] Hold! Where did you get this, Ella?

ELLA.

'Tis the same you brought me, sir.

GOODMAN.

My dear, that was but your own height, while this is half as long again. See! [*He measures the bough beside her.*] How can it be the same, my child?

GOODWIFE.

[*Sneering.*] Aye, how can it be the same, my child?

ELLA.

[*Taking the bough from her father.*] Father, I called on my mother's name, and I cried, and as my tears fell on the bough it grew, and grew, and . . . Oh, my Father! Oh, Mother, Mother! [*Runs outside again, sobbing bitterly.*]

GOODWIFE.

Well, now are your eyes opened?

GOODMAN.

[*Walking to and fro, perplexed.*] I don't know what to think.

GOODWIFE.

Don't exert your pin-head brains. I do the thinking for this family. Innocent little Ella. Artless maid. By cutting a longer, stouter bough she shrewdly planned to put herself beyond the power of my arm. Not so, however. I'm not to be duped with yarns of orphan tears and angel mothers! As waxes the bough so the whipping! [*She claps hands and calls.*] Cinderella! Come, scullion! I want you!

GOODMAN.

Do you realize that no hazel tree grows within a mile of this spot? I know every growth hereabouts, and I tell you——

GOODWIFE.

And I tell you I won't be tricked, laughed at to my face! [*Her daughters voice approval of this.*] Cinderella, if you don't come immediately——

ELLA.

[*Entering.*] Madam, I come.

GOODWIFE.

Well, how grows the bough? [*ELLA gives her the bough and again this is seen to have grown mysteriously.*] Almost a tree, eh? What say you to that?

GOODMAN.

[*Taking the bough from his wife and giving it back to ELLA.*] Take it out once more, lass.

GOODWIFE.

Aye, do. And then bring back the tree; root, stem and branch and all!

GOODMAN.

[*Detaining ELLA.*] Wait a bit. [*He takes his famous potato-knife, and marks a cross on the bough, then returns this to his child.*] Now go. [*ELLA obeys.*]

VAINBETTY.

I trust this sweet domestic scene draws near its conclusion. My sister and I are expecting company.

GOODMAN.

This matter shall be settled for good and all. I never yet have caught the lass in an untruth.

GOODWIFE.

You, you blind mole. Anyone could take you in!

GOODMAN.

'Tis a fact I'm a bit credulous. Even I believed you when you swore you loved my child as your own, and would make a happy home for her and me!

GOODWIFE.

That's right. Insult me, do!

VAINBETTY AND SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Threatening him.*] If you insult our mother . . . !

GOODWIFE.

But I'll get even with you. I'll take it out on your child! [*Calls.*] Cinderella! Scullion. Bring me in your tree!

ELLA.

[*Entering.*] Here it is, Madam. [*Holds out the bough which now is seen mysteriously to have grown to a sapling.*]

GOODWIFE.

[*Examining it, triumphantly, to GOODMAN.*] What did I tell you? This time she brings us a sapling: root, stem, branch and all. However, my arm is equal to it. Come, my gentle beauty. I'll thrash the nonsense out of you! [*Again her daughters signify their approval.*]

GOODMAN.

Better look for the cross I cut on it, first.

GOODWIFE.

[*Sneering.*] The cross, indeed! If there's a cross on it I'll leave the mark of it on your angel-child! [*About to strike ELLA, suddenly shrieks with pain and drops the sapling.*] Ah-h! I'm bewitched! I'm scorched. My flesh is branded, seared! [*She sinks into a chair, rocks to and fro.*]

VAINBETTY AND SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Overawed, examining their mother's hand.*] A cross!

GOODMAN.

[*After a slight pause.*] I think I'll go brush up a bit!
[*Going toward his room.*]

ELLA.

May I have my sapling, Father?

GOODMAN.

Ask the mistress of the house.

GOODWIFE.

[*To whom ELLA turns in mute appeal.*] Do with it as you will! [*ELLA picks up her sapling and carries it out. Her father goes into his room. The three women stare one at another in tense silence, for a moment or so.*]

VAINBETTY.

Can't you send her away, get rid of her somehow; take her for a picnic and lose her in the forest?

GOODWIFE.

Can you dress your own hair?

SCRATCHCATTY.

Can't you afford to pay a maid-servant?

GOODWIFE.

What hireling could get through the household drudgery that she does, and still have time to lace your bodice, eh? [*Rises, walks to the window.*] The whole situation is uncanny. It gives me the creeps. Look yonder

now. That slimpsy sapling—she has planted it on her mother's grave where, as I watch, it is developing into a full-sized tree. Now it bears nuts. And now birds and squirrels are nesting in its branches!

VAINBETTY.

That's easily explained. It is intensive farming. I learned about it at boarding-school.

SCRATCHCATTY.

Or auto-hypnosis. Self-delusion. In this case mother is flighty, not to say plain nutty! [*She and her sister laugh.*]

VAINBETTY.

All the same we ought to get rid of her. She grows better looking every day! Whenever I look at her I want to seize her by the hair of her head, and—— What business has a step-sister with such hair!

GOODWIFE.

The trouble is, she is protected. Listen. She has a godmother.

SCRATCHCATTY.

A godmother? Well, and so have we, like all good Christians!

GOODWIFE.

Ah, but Ella's godmother is a very grand old lady, living in a castle. She has money!

VAINBETTY.

Which she will leave to Ella. All the more reason for getting rid of Ella!

GOODWIFE.

More easily said than done, since fairy godmothers have organized this Child Welfare movement. In the good old days nothing was simpler than to get rid of one's superfluous relations. One merely dropped them into the well, or took them to the circus and fed them to the bears, like buns! But, nowadays, the Health Inspectors, nose creatures, analyze the well-water, for the relation-microbe, while as for the bears, they're so stupidly hygienic they won't look at anything but breakfast food! It's an outrage! [*A trumpet call is heard. All exclaim and run to the window.*]

GOODMAN.

[*Hurries in, in shirt-sleeves, putting coat on.*] What's this? A King's Herald here! [*There is a knock at the door.*]

HERALD.

[*Outside.*] Open, in the King's name! [*The GOODMAN opens. HERALD enters.*] In the name of King Pomposity the Twenty-Seventh! [*All bow.*] Hearken to the royal will. [*All bow again.*] I address the goodman, the goodwife, and the maidens of this household, greeting!

GOODWIFE.

You see us before you.

HERALD.

All?

GOODWIFE.

All.

HERALD.

Not so, according to the latest census. Eh, Magpie?
[*A large MAGPIE steps in and hands the HERALD a birch-bark scroll.*] There remains one Ella.

GOODWIFE.

Oh, to be sure; our dear little Ella!

HERALD.

[*Returning scroll to MAGPIE.*] Summon her, this dear little missing miss, Ella.

GOODWIFE.

[*Claps hands, calls.*] Cinderella.

VAINBETTY AND SCRATCHCATTY.

Cendrillon. Aschenbroedel. Aschenpuettel! Cinderella.

HERALD.

Eh? Have we those names recorded, Magpie?

GOODWIFE.

[*Hurriedly.*] Pet names in many languages! Where has the little sunbeam flitted to! [ELLA enters.] Ah, here she is.

HERALD.

[*Prepares to read from a parchment scroll.*] Good. "In the name of"—hm, hm. "Whereas . . ." [*Clears throat.*]

GOODWIFE.

[*Running to the cupboard.*] Do let me give you a drink of home-made wine.

HERALD.

Wine, yes, thanks. But, home-made? Haven't you a drop of some rare and priceless vintage. I'm fed up with the kind that mother used to make.

GOODMAN.

[*Producing a bottle and glass.*] Pray, sir, taste of this.

HERALD.

[*Drinks.*] That's better. "Whereas——" Hm, hm. "Whereas His Royal Highness, the Prince Affability, has come of age——" [*Drinks again.*]

VAINBETTY.

That dear Prince Affability!

SCRATCHCATTY.

How gracious of him to have come of age!

HERALD.

"And whereas 'tis meet that he should choose a bride"—Hm, hm. [*Drinks.*]

GOODWIFE, VAINBETTY AND SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Nudge one another.*] A bride! The Prince would choose a bride!

HERALD.

"His Majesty the King is graciously pleased to give a ball"—[*ALL exclaim, "A ball!"*] "at the royal palace, to-night, to-morrow night, and the night of the day after to-morrow, to which all families with marriageable daughters are bidden!" [*Drinks.*] God save the King!

ALL.

Long live the King! [*The HERALD followed by the MAGPIE goes. General excitement reigns. The GOODWIFE and her daughters bustle about, making preparations.*]

VAINBETTY.

A ball, three nights running, Cinderella, come pin these ornaments in my hair! The Prince, the Prince! A Prince's bride!

SCRATCHCATTY.

Cinderella, come lace me tighter! A Prince's bride!

VAINBETTY.

What is that I hear? Sister-in-law to royalty is as near as you may hope to get!

SCRATCHCATTY.

Sister-in-law, yourself. And not even invited to a Sunday dinner, if you presume on the relationship!

VAINBETTY.

Hear her! Hear her! I am the handsomer by far. Eh, Mother?

SCRATCHCATTY.

Just listen to her! Listen to her! My manner is incomparably the more taking! Eh, Mother?

GOODWIFE.

Mother-in-law to a Prince. A near-queen-dowager, so to speak! The sentry will present arms, as I go and come! Don't waste breath disputing, Daughters; 'twill mottle your complexions, make your noses red. Perhaps the Prince will pass a law enabling him to marry you both. My fan, get me my fan, you Cinderella, you! Lucky we have our new finery! Mother-in-law to a Prince! [*Parading up and down, making court curtses.*]

VAINBETTY.

[*Parading, as a queen.*] Princess Vainbetty. Future queen! Kiss my hand, varlet!

SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Doing likewise.*] Scratchcatty, bride of His Royal Highness, Prince Affability. Daughter-in-law of King Pomposity the Twenty-Seventh. Queen Scratchcatty to

be! Rise up, Sir Knight! Ladies, my train! My sceptre, my crown! Bring me my sceptre, crown!

GOODMAN.

[*Has stood staring at them.*] Well, upon my word!
[*Roars with laughter.*] 'Tis like play-acting. I vow I haven't laughed so much since the mummers passed this way!

GOODWIFE.

[*Stands, transfixing him with a haughty stare.*] Low-lived caitiff! Can you deny that you are a low-lived caitiff?

GOODMAN.

First let me look up "caitiff" in the dictionary.

GOODWIFE.

[*Checking him as he takes book from shelf.*] Later! Just now you had better go harness your old horse to your old coach, and prepare to drive us to the ball!

GOODMAN.

[*About to comply.*] Anything for a quiet life. Why don't you get ready, Ella?

GOODWIFE AND HER DAUGHTERS.

Ella get ready for the ball? Cinderella?

ELLA.

[*Overjoyed.*] Oh, Father, then I may accompany you?

GOODMAN.

Why not? You are invited!

GOODWIFE.

I have something to say about that. Her tasks are not yet done.

ELLA.

[*Looks about, surprised.*] Madam, what remains?

GOODWIFE.

What remains? Why, this! [*Seizes sack of beans and empties this out of window.*]

GOODMAN.

Peppercornelia! What are you doing? Emptying those fine old has-beens on to the ash-heap!

GOODWIFE.

Precisely. Now you Cinderella, you. Sort those beans from the ashes, and you shall accompany me and my daughters to the ball. [*Throws sack to ELLA, the two daughters deriding her, meanwhile.*]

GOODMAN.

It's an outrage. But, never mind, lass; father will help you. Aye, with my new, patent cindersifter! [*Goes toward ELLA.*]

GOODWIFE.

[*Interposing.*] You'll do nothing of the sort. You'll harness up. But first you'll put on your Sunday coat.

[*Pushes him toward his room.*] I'm mistress in this house! [*ELLA signs to her father not to mind, and goes out quietly through the scullery.*]

GOODWIFE.

[*Triumphantly.*] That will cook her goose! [*Renews her parading. There is a knock at the door.*] Ha, who knocks? Where are my lackeys? [*The knock is repeated.*]

VAINBETTY.

It's that silly lieutenant. Let him knock. [*The knock is repeated.*] Come in. Oh, come in, do! [*Throws the door open, impatiently.*]

LIEUTENANT.

[*Entering, affectedly.*] Greetings, ladies! Ha, Mistress Vainbetty! What a vision of loveliness! Permit me! [*Holds out a tiny nosegay.*] A simple posy!

VAINBETTY.

[*Without noticing him, to her mother.*] Is my color high enough, or do I need another coat of paint? Have I shaped my eyebrows archly?

LIEUTENANT.

[*Trying to attract her attention.*] There's a moon to-night. A whole moon. I thought to tempt you to a moonlight stroll adown the moonlit lane!

VAINBETTY.

[*Sweeping about the stage.*] Do I manage my train right?

LIEUTENANT.

[*Skipping about after her with his offering.*] A simple posy! A moonlight stroll!

VAINBETTY.

[*Turning on him, exasperated.*] Bother your moonlight stroll! As for your simple posy—[*Snatching it, she throws it at his head.*] You little tin-soldier, you!

LIEUTENANT.

[*Amazed.*] Little tin-soldier! I! A lieutenant with a waxed mustache!

GOODWIFE.

[*Explains, condescendingly.*] The Lady Vainbetty only wears royal bouquets, strolls only with royal personages, under a royal moon! [*She resumes her parading.*]

LIEUTENANT.

[*Amazed, retires into the background.*] Mad! Stark staring mad!

ELLA.

[*Comes, by way of the scullery with the sack filled again.*] Here, Madam, are the beans. [*She places the sack on the table.*]

GOODWIFE.

What's that? Already? Impossible! [*Her DAUGHTERS echo her surprise.*]

GOODMAN.

[*Coming from his room, neckcloth in hand.*] Ella, El-la! Here, child; come fold my neckcloth. No one does it so well.

ELLA.

[*Obeying him.*] There! No one will have a handsomer father at the ball.

GOODMAN.

[*Sighing.*] Little one, my heart is heavy, leaving you behind.

ELLA.

But I can go with you. I have finished my task.

GOODMAN.

What? Already?

ELLA.

My doves and pigeons helped me, the darlings.

GOODMAN.

Brave birds! Haste, then, and make ready, before the goodwife can change her mind.

VAINBETTY.

What's all this? The kitchen-wench wishes to accompany us? First let her complete her task! [*She empties the sack out of window, as her mother did before.*] Let her sort the beans from the ashes, on my account.

GOODMAN.

'Tis an outrage. Why, one would think you had a grudge against the lass!

GOODWIFE.

Stop your prating, and don court costume, good, my Lord; then haste to see wherefore the servitors delay the equipage!

LIEUTENANT.

[*In his corner.*] Mad! Raving mad! [*The GOODMAN shakes his head, returns to his room. ELLA quietly takes the sack and goes out again. A knock is heard.*]

SCRATCHCATTY.

[*To her mother.*] Is my expression right? Delicate and languishing? Am I irresistible? [*The knock is repeated.*] Bother! 'Tis that stupid counselor! [*Knock repeated. She flings the door wide, impatiently.*] Oh, come in; do!

COUNSELOR.

[*Enters stiffly.*] Your servant, ladies. Mistress Scratchcatty, how fine you look! Too fine, if I may say so, for a prayer-meeting! Allow me. [*Offers her an immense stiff nosegay.*] A bunch of wayside flowers!

SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Sweeping about.*] Do I manage my train right? [*Curtseys to an imaginary person.*] Your Royal Highness!

COUNSELOR.

[*Following her about.*] Mistress Scratchcatty, I invite you to a prayer-meeting. I offer you a bunch of wayside flowers!

SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Turns on him.*] To Jericho with your prayer-meeting, your wayside flowers, you graven image, you! [*Snatching his nosegay, she throws it at him.*]

COUNSELOR.

[*Bewildered.*] Eh? A graven image? I!

GOODWIFE.

[*Explaining.*] The Lady Scratchcatty wears only royal flowers, accompanies only royal personages to royal prayer-meetings! [*She resumes her parading.*]

COUNSELOR.

Mad! Stark, staring, raving mad! [*He retreats into the corner with the LIEUTENANT.*]

ELLA.

[*Enters, with the sack filled.*] Here are the beans, all sorted out. My pigeons and doves helped me, the darlings!

GOODMAN.

[*Coming from his room, fully dressed.*] Brave birds! Then make ready, child!

SCRATCHCATTY.

Not so fast! Let her fill the sack again on my account! [*She also empties the sack out of window.*] Scullery-maid! You Cinderella, you!

GOODMAN.

Now I protest, that's scandalous. But, this time, go she shall!

GOODWIFE.

[*Pushing him toward the door.*] Cease prating, I say, and go order our equipage, summon our liveries! [*Wearily, the GOODMAN takes a lantern, and goes out. ELLA goes quietly through the scullery. The two visitors exchange bewildered glances.*]

LIEUTENANT.

Our equipage! Mad! Stark, staring mad!

COUNSELOR.

Our liveries! Raving, staring mad! [*Together they tiptoe out, closing the door softly behind them. The three women don their wraps.*]

VAINBETTY.

[*Looks out of side-window.*] 'Tis true: her doves and pigeons are helping her.

GOODWIFE.

Well, what of that?

VAINBETTY.

What if her father insists on taking her with us?

GOODWIFE.

She has nothing fit to wear.

SCRATCHCATTY.

She has her mother's clothes. Dainty, delicate; nothing that we could get into!

GOODWIFE.

That's true! [*She unlocks and opens the clothes-press.*] What shall we do? Wait! I have it! [*She goes to the hearth, takes a shovelful of ashes, which she showers over the garments in the press. Her DAUGHTERS, laughing fiendishly, assist her.*] There! And there. And there! . . . Look out. I hear her coming.

ELLA.

[*Enters, the sack filled.*] Here, Madam, are the beans.

GOODMAN.

[*Appears at the door, whip in hand.*] Coach is ready! Well, my lass. How now?

ELLA.

'Tis done, Father. My doves and pigeons helped me, the darlings. And now really I may go to the ball, mayn't I?

GOODMAN.

You may, and you shall. Or no one goes from this

house to-night. Let that be understood! [*Makes a cut with the whip.*]

GOODWIFE.

Why threaten? No one prevents her. My daughters and I wait for her.

VAINBETTY.

Surely we do.

SCRATCHCATTY.

We'll even help her, be her tire-maidens.

ELLA.

[*Surprised and pleased.*] How kind! Madam, may I have your key to the clothes-press? My mother's clothes fit me as had they been fashioned for me.

GOODWIFE.

Surely! I'll even unlock it for you, myself. [*She does so.*]

GOODMAN.

Now this is as it should be! Motherly, sisterly, kind!

ELLA.

I will not keep you long. [*About to take out a gown, cries out, horrified.*]

GOODWIFE AND HER DAUGHTERS.

What is the matter? [*With pretended sympathy.*]

GOODMAN.

What ails you, lass?

ELLA.

They are ruined, covered with ashes, soot—my mother's dainty frocks!

GOODMAN.

What devil's trick is this?

GOODWIFE.

[*Bursting into mocking laughter.*] Ha, ha! Queen of the ash-heap! You'd go to the ball, would you? Cinderella at the ball!

VAINBETTY.

Cendrillon, the kitchen-wench! Ha, ha, ha! Thought you'd dance with the Prince, no doubt!

SCRATCHCATTY.

Come just as you are, in your sooty rags! You'd be the belle, I warrant! The Prince would fall in love with you, perhaps; aye, marry you, Aschenbroedel! Aschenpuettel! Scullion! Cinderella! [*Mocking her with laughter, gibe, and fingers pointed at her, the three women go out. The GOODMAN follows, raising his hands in despair, as if to say that the situation is beyond him. The coach is heard, departing. ELLA who has stood confronting her tormenters with bowed head, now runs out, sobbing, through the scullery. The LIEUTENANT and the COUNSELOR enter, quietly.*]

LIEUTENANT.

The young person who sifts the cinders has a pleasing countenance.

COUNSELOR.

An uncommonly pleasing countenance.

LIEUTENANT.

I'm going to give the poor thing a treat. I'm going to show her how it feels to be kissed by a lieutenant with a waxed mustache, by the light of the moon!

COUNSELOR.

[*Taking a coin from pocket.*] She'd rather have this gold-piece to buy a new frock to wear at prayer-meeting.

LIEUTENANT.

We'll see about that! I wonder where she is?

DAME TRULY.

[*Who has entered, quietly behind them.*] Rascals! Villains! Knaves! [*Beats them with her stick.*]

LIEUTENANT.

Ouch! Madam, I meant no harm, on my honor!

COUNSELOR.

Madam, on my honor, I meant no harm! Ouch!

DAME TRULY.

[*Chasing them out.*] Rascals, calling on a young lady to whom you have not been introduced!

LIEUTENANT.

I apologize. On my honor! What a muscular old lady!

COUNSELOR.

On my honor, I apologize. What a very hard stick!
 [*They run away; DAME TRULY retreats into the shadows as ELLA enters. ELLA closes the door, then kneels in front of the fire, face covered with hands. The DAME comes forth and sits beside the hearth.*]

ELLA.

[*After a pause.*] Oh, my mother! Oh, if only there were someone on earth to turn to!

DAME TRULY.

Poof! There always is someone!

ELLA.

[*Surprised, sees her.*] Dame Truly! I did not know you were here.

DAME TRULY.

I tell you, there always is someone. What about that fairy godmother of yours?

ELLA.

Oh, she lives a long, long way away.

DAME TRULY.

Thoughts can travel long, long distances.

ELLA.

She lives in a castle. My thoughts might not gain admittance there.

DAME TRULY.

You're afraid of the footmen. Footmen are only painted wood. I had mine thrown away. But the housemaids said they were human beings, and set them up in business, and married them.

ELLA.

That was nice.

DAME TRULY.

Not at all nice for me. I lost my capable housemaids. [*A slight pause, during which both gaze into the embers.*] It's a pretty sight, isn't it?

ELLA.

Oh, do you see it, too? The lights and the flowers, and the fountains. And do you hear the music? Oh, the music! It fairly makes one dance.

DAME TRULY.

And the courtiers, the guests; the bowing and the bending, and all the silly flummery!

ELLA.

The Prince, now I see the Prince.

DAME TRULY.

Nice boy, the Prince. Good, clean boy. Well-brought

up. Doesn't spend beyond his allowance. No borrowing. No gambling debts. A hard worker, too. Will make a good king, when his time comes.

ELLA.

He's choosing a partner to tread a measure with him. It looks like—it is, Vainbetty! How proudly my step-mother bears herself! And now he gives his hand to another lady. This time it is Scratchcatty. In a room far beyond I see my father, with other gentlemen, playing cards, and yawning. Poor father, he is not enjoying himself. But, oh, how beautiful it is, as they dance! And now, alas! the dream fades! [*The back of the room disappears, and this palatial scene is visible while ELLA and the DAME describe it. They, however, see it all in the fire.*]

DAME TRULY.

Those dreams are a short-lived family. I've harbored a good many, in my time: the Brown-Studies and Hallucinations; the Day-dreams and the Nightmares. Very few of them get anywhere.

ELLA.

Poor dears. But they give such pleasure, while they last; at least, all mine do!

DAME TRULY.

That comes of having a good digestion. And so when I came in you were crying your eyes out, because you want to go to that ball!

ELLA.

Dame Truly, however did you guess?

DAME TRULY.

Poof! I merely thought back a few score of years!
Well, why don't you go?

ELLA.

Clothes. I have none befitting.

DAME TRULY.

Your mother's.

ELLA.

[*Going to the clothes-press.*] I don't know how—I
can't explain—— But cinders, ashes, soot!

DAME TRULY.

Poof! Such things never hurt a really good material.
A simple application of dew mixed with moonshine will
renew them! Try it!

ELLA.

[*Carrying a frock out, through the scullery.*] That
sounds wonderful! Moonshine mixed with dew.

DAME TRULY.

[*Left alone, dances to the sound of elfish music, singing*]

Though not so young as I used to be,
I'm blithe and nimble, as still you see.
The years drop off, at an old refrain,
And my heels are as young as my heart, again!

ELLA.

[*Enters, fastening the dress on.*] It is wonderful! It is far lovelier than before! See, Dame!

DAME TRULY.

Not bad. Now you need a scarf.

ELLA.

I fear I have none.

DAME TRULY.

You mean, others have despoiled you of everything that they could use. Luckily, I noticed one, hanging on the tree, as I came in! [*Points out of window.*] The finest gossamer!

ELLA.

Dear Dame, that is a cobweb!

DAME TRULY.

Cobweb? Poof! What are young people's eyes good for, nowadays? A famous spinner has been at work on it for you. Bid your birds throw it down.

ELLA.

I will! [*Whistles and coos.*]

Little bird, little bird, on the tree,

My gossamer scarf throw down to me!

[*Answering whistles and cooings are heard, and a beautiful scarf is thrown to her, as she leans from the window.*]

DAME TRULY.

You see? Now for your wreath.

ELLA.

I fear I have no wreath.

DAME TRULY.

Poof! When all day the meadow-milliners have been weaving you one! I notice they hung it, for safety, and also perhaps as an advertisement, on the tree. Ask for it!

ELLA.

Little bird, little bird, on the tree,

My wreath of flowers throw down to me!

[*A beautiful wreath is thrown to her. With an exclamation of delight she puts it on.*]

DAME TRULY.

[*Assisting her.*] So far so good. But you can't dance, in those wooden shoes.

ELLA.

Dear Dame, I have none others.

DAME TRULY.

Dancing shoes, bronze-gold, satin-lined, and edged with fur, the tree-cobblers have been busy fabricating them in time! Look and see!

ELLA.

[*Looks out of window.*] Dear Dame, indeed I only see nuts upon the bough!

DAME TRULY.

Nuts? Dancing-slippers. Ask for them.

ELLA.

Little bird, little bird on the tree,
My dancing-slippers throw down to me!

[*A pair of beautiful slippers is thrown to her. She exclaims with delight, and puts them on.*] Aren't they beautiful? They make the feet dance! Now at last I'm ready. [*Turns about for inspection.*] Is all as it should be, now?

DAME TRULY.

What says your looking-glass?

ELLA.

My locking-glass? I have none. And my step-sisters have hung theirs beyond my reach!

DAME TRULY.

There's a fine large one outside.

ELLA.

You mean the pond. I looked in that just now, but I did not see myself. In my stead I saw a wonderfully beautiful young maiden, like a bride!

DAME TRULY.

Strange! Just now, as I passed the pond I saw in it, not myself, but a very plain old woman!

ELLA.

[*After a moment's thought, laughs.*] I understand. But I could not possibly look like what I saw!

DAME TRULY.

Exactly my own reflection! . . . Come, you had better be starting.

ELLA.

Oh, I forgot. It is of no use. How can I go, without a coach to carry me?

DAME TRULY.

Coach? Poof! There's one, under the table. [*Points with stick.*]

ELLA.

That? Dear Dame, believe me, that is a pumpkin, not a coach!

DAME TRULY.

[*Emphasizing with her stick.*] A coach! Open the door while I roll it outside. [*ELLA obeys. The DAME pushes the pumpkin out.*]

ELLA.

[*Crying out and clapping hands for joy.*] Why, even

as I look at it, it is turning into the most beautiful gold coach! But horses, Dame; what shall I do for horses?

DAME TRULY.

I saw six cream-white steeds out there. Look for yourself.

ELLA.

[*Looks forth.*] I only see the field-mice, scuttling from their hiding-places.

DAME TRULY.

Blooded steeds. Where are those grasshoppers—I mean, grooms! [*Strikes her stick upon the floor. The sound of champing horses is heard.*]

ELLA.

[*Looking from the front window.*] It is as you say: six cream-white steeds! But who will drive me?

DAME TRULY.

Your coachman. Hear him now; as usual, scolding the lackeys.

ELLA.

[*Listens.*] Indeed, dear Dame, that is but the squirrels chattering.

DAME TRULY.

Poof! Don't tell me! [*There is a knock at the door.*] This is he. Come in! [*A SQUIRREL-COACHMAN enters, followed by two SQUIRREL-LACKEYS.*]

COACHMAN.

The Lady Ella's coach awaits the Lady Ella's pleasure!

DAME TRULY.

Good. Wait outside! [*The COACHMAN and LACKEYS obey.*] Now, my child, go, enjoy yourself. But mind you leave the ball before the stroke of twelve. At midnight your finery will vanish, clothes and equipage, and you will become the little kitchen-wench again, the mock of the beholders, spurned by your stepmother and step-sisters, shaming your good father who is powerless to help you, discrediting your mother's memory!

ELLA.

I will not forget. From my heart I thank you. [*Kisses DAME TRULY's hand.*] I know you now. You are my fairy godmother!

DAME TRULY.

Poof! [*Strikes with stick thrice on floor. The LACKEYS open the door, standing like sentinels while ELLA passes out. The coach is heard departing, and the scene is veiled in darkness, ending the ACT.*]

INTERLUDE.

[*Music is heard. The scene gradually lightens. Again the back wall of the living-room disappears, and the ball-room is shown. The PRINCE is dancing with ELLA, while the courtiers and guests look on, admiring or with envy, according to character. The dance ended, the PRINCE leads his fair partner to a seat, and bends over her, about to kiss her hand. At the moment a clock begins to strike the midnight hour, on which the young girl, with a frightened start, breaks from the PRINCE and runs, leaving him looking after her amazedly. Then, recovering his wits, he follows in pursuit. At the far entrance he stands bewildered, as if all trace of his quarry were lost. Then his eye falls upon a tiny object on the ground. Picking this up he examines it, lifts it high, in triumph, showing it to be one of ELLA's slippers. Darkness falls upon the scene.*

The midnight striking of the palace clock is taken up by innumerable others: cuckoo, cathedral chimes, and clocks of the common variety. As this chorus ends the voice of the WATCHMAN is heard, and his figure is seen dimly, crossing the scene, lantern in hand.]

WATCHMAN.

[*Cries out.*] Twelve o' the night, the moon shines bright, and all is well! [*Again darkness veils the scene.*]

ACT II

[*One clock, behind the others, finishes striking. By a ray of moonlight the living-room of the cottage again is seen, the fire nearly dead, and ELLA in her humble garments, sleeping beside it. She wakens, looks about her.*]

ELLA.

[*Half-awake.*] Midnight! Oh, what an escape! What an escape! Last night I remembered in time, and the night of the day before yesterday. But to-night—just as he was about to kiss my hand—the Prince . . . Silly Ella! You have been dreaming! You with a fairy god-mother, a pumpkin coach, six cream-white steeds, lackeys, and a squirrel coachman! You with the most beautiful clothes in the world! You the chosen partner of the Prince! Yonder is poor father's prize pumpkin. And, without, the field-mice are scuttling to their hiding-places, and the big squirrel is scolding the little squirrel for disturbing him, and here am I, the kitchen-drudge, with the fire nearly out! [*She mends the fire.*] Ah, me! 'Twas but a dream! And yet what happiness such dreams bring, while they last! [*The flame flares up, and by its light she sees a tiny object on the floor.*] What's this? It cannot be—— It is, one of my dancing-slippers! In my

dream there was pitch upon the ground, and one slipper stuck to it, and came off, as I was hurrying to my coach! Then what if the dream be true! [*A coach is heard approaching, then stopping at the door. There are voices without. ELLA hides the slipper in her bosom, as her stepmother and stepsisters enter.*]

ELLA.

[*Meeting them.*] Madam, young ladies, you enjoyed yourselves, I trust?

GOODWIFE.

[*Sharply.*] Don't talk to me. Here, take my wraps, you Cinderella, you!

VAINBETTY.

[*Sharply.*] Cendrillon, come and unpin my hair. And if you tug I'll slap you!

SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Sharply.*] Here, Aschenbroedel, come unlace me. I'm suffocating! [*ELLA runs from one to another, assisting them. The GOODMAN enters with a lantern.*]

GOODMAN.

[*Setting down lantern, taking coat off.*] Well, and so the great ball is over! The royal ball. The old horse could not make the journey three times running, to and fro, so we put up at a hostelry near by the palace. You were not alarmed about us, Ella, child?

ELLA.

Oh, no, Father. My doves and pigeons told me all about it.

GOODWIFE.

Doves and pigeons, indeed!

GOODMAN.

And you were not lonely in our absence?

ELLA.

Lonely? Oh, Father, no! I never had a happier time. The music, the fountains, the dainties to eat and drink, the dancing, the guests, the courtiers and the Prince—— Ah-h! [*Rapturously.*] I wish it might have lasted forever!

GOODWIFE AND DAUGHTERS.

[*Sharply.*] What's all this?

GOODMAN.

[*Laughing indulgently.*] Just a young girl's dream.

GOODWIFE.

She has no business with such dreams, a kitchen-wench, as she is!

VAINBETTY AND SCRATCHCATTY.

I should say not, little scullion; ash-heap girl!

GOODMAN.

At any rate I trust you are cured of your royal ambitions. Mother-in-law to the future king; eh, Goodwife? Ha, ha!

GOODWIFE.

[*Angrily.*] If you laugh at me I'll turn you out of the house! So there!

VAINBETTY.

I was getting on with him swimmingly, till that stranger appeared, sweeping all before her!

SCRATCHCATTY.

He was just about to declare himself, when that stranger appeared, sweeping all before her.

VAINBETTY.

Declare himself to you? Ha, ha!

SCRATCHCATTY.

Did you think he was about to declare himself to you? Ha, ha! Peacock! Peacock!

VAINBETTY.

Pig! Pig!

GOODMAN.

Tut, tut! Calling names won't help. No one had a chance, with that strange lady in the world. Strange, we call her? To me she looked as natural as the day. All petty ambitions and animosities melted before her wholesome goodness, like clouds and darkness before the radiant dawn!

GOODWIFE.

Oh, stop your rhapsodizing, and get to bed!

ELLA.

What was her name, Father—this lady's name?

GOODMAN.

Oddly enough, child, that of your mother before you,

and your own: Ella. [*He turns out the light and goes into his room.*]

ELLA.

[*Echoes, softly.*] Ella. The Lady Ella.

GOODWIFE.

[*Going into her room.*] Ella. But don't dream you are in her shoes, you Cinderella, you!

VAINBETTY AND SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Going into their room.*] Ha, ha! That ash-heap queen in the shoes of the Lady Ella!

ELLA.

[*Lying down again before the fire, slipper in hand.*] Ella! The Lady Ella! [*The fire dies. Darkness reigns, for a few seconds. Then daylight creeps into the room, brightening gradually. The HERALD'S trumpet is heard without, then there is a knock at the door. ELLA awakens, and rises. The others come from their rooms in dressing-gowns, night-caps, curl-papers, etc.*]

HERALD.

[*Outside.*] Open in the name of King Pomposity the Twenty-Seventh.

GOODWIFE.

[*Excited.*] The King's Herald, here! Girls, take your hair out of curl-papers!

VAINBETTY.

The dear Prince has sent to inquire how we rested.

SCRATCHCATTY.

Ah, they have discovered that strange beauty to be an adventuress, no doubt! [*The HERALD knocks again.*]

GOODMAN.

[*Yawning, drawing on his coat.*] Coming, coming! Loyalty is loyal, but sleepy, that's all! [*Opens.*] God Save the King!

HERALD.

[*Entering.*] And high time, too. I mean, high time you should say it. Now hearken to the royal will and pleasure. [*Unfolds a scroll.*] "Whereas——" Hm, hm!

GOODMAN.

You finished our wine on your earlier visit. Will water serve?

HERALD.

It hasn't the same lubricating effect at all. "Whereas . . ."

PRINCE AFFABILITY.

[*Enters, escorted by two GENTLEMEN.*] Peace, silly Whereas.

ALL.

[*Making low reverences.*] The Prince! His Royal Highness the Prince Affability! [*The young women hastily seek to straighten their dishevelment.*]

PRINCE.

A beautiful unknown graced my ball, vanishing each night on the stroke of twelve—the Lady Ella. Seeking to trace her to her home, on the third night I caused pitch to be spread on her pathway. To this one tiny dancing-slipper stuck! [*He holds up ELLA'S slipper.*]

HERALD.

[*Trying to read from scroll.*] “Accordingly, know all men by these presents——”

MAGPIE.

[*Interrupting.*] And more particularly all women——

PRINCE.

Peace, peace! The owner of this slipper owns my heart. Her only will I wed.

HERALD.

[*Trying to read.*] “Wherefore——”

MAGPIE.

[*Correcting.*] “Therefore——”

PRINCE.

I go from house to house, from castle to cottage, throughout my father's realm——

HERALD.

[*Reading.*] “Wherever are marriageable young women——”

MAGPIE.

[*Interpolating.*] According to the latest census.

PRINCE.

Seeking the owner of this slipper, for my bride!

GOODWIFE.

[*Smirking.*] Your Royal Highness need seek no further. Here she stands. Stand back, Scratchcatty. The older first. Vainbetty, who appeared as the Lady Ella at your ball. [*She presents VAINBETTY.*]

PRINCE.

[*Bows low, but looks doubtful.*] Ah, Mistress Vainbetty. I hardly think, however, that she is She! I mean the she I seek!

GOODWIFE.

I assure you, sir, 'tis she and no other wore that slipper.

PRINCE.

Let her prove it, try it on!

VAINBETTY.

[*To her mother, whispering.*] I never can cram my foot into that!

GOODWIFE.

[*Seizing the GOODMAN'S patent knife.*] Here! I'll cut your toe off! [*She does so, unseen by the PRINCE. Then the GENTLEMEN advance, taking the slipper from the PRINCE and fit it on her foot.*]

GENTLEMEN.

A tight squeeze, but, yes, it fits!

GOODWIFE.

You see?

VAINBETTY.

[*Sticking her foot out.*] You see?

PRINCE.

I—I suppose I see! Perhaps 'tis not to be expected that ladies should look their best in the morning, eh, gentlemen? [*Aside, to his GENTLEMEN.*]

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

A crown is warranted to render its wearer beautiful, Your Royal Highness, at any time of day.

PRINCE.

Perhaps so. Let the Ladies-in-waiting array Mistress Vainbetty for the marriage ceremony. [*LADIES enter, throw a veil over VAINBETTY'S head and a mantle about her shoulders. NEIGHBORS meanwhile gather about the open door, the LIEUTENANT and the COUNSELOR among them.*]

VAINBETTY.

I hope to goodness the ceremony will be a short one. I can't stand the pain of this much longer.

GOODWIFE.

Smile, my child. Look pleasant, till you're married.

Then you can behave as you please! Prince, behold your bride!

PRINCE.

[*Offers VAINBETTY his hand.*] Permit me, Mistress!

DAME TRULY.

[*Entering.*] Why, the Princess-to-be has only one shoe on.

VAINBETTY.

We shall pick up the other by the way. Good-bye Mother, Sister. I daresay I shall see you some day at the court, at one of the big crushes when everyone is asked! Prince, shall we be jogging? [*Trumpets sound. The procession starts. The NEIGHBORS wave, toss caps, cry out, "Long live Prince Affability and Princess Vainbetty, future King and Queen!"*]

SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Derisively.*] Vainbetty never can go through with it! [*Looks after the procession.*] Ha, ha! How she limps! And, see! She leaves a trail of blood! [*Suddenly there is a commotion outside, then a pause.*]

ELLA.

[*Who has stood in the background all this time.*] Hark! My doves and pigeons, what is it they say?
 Creeping, crawling, like a snail,
 Blood the bride leaves on her trail.
 Prince, your choice you'll surely rue,
 Since her foot fits not the shoe!

[*The procession returns, the NEIGHBORS deriding VAINBETTY who is crying.*]

PRINCE.

There has been some deception here. This is not the owner of the slipper! [*The NEIGHBORS repeat the rhyme.*]

VAINBETTY.

[*Moaning, removes the slipper.*] Oh, I confess everything. Here, Prince; here's your slipper. Please, Mother, hand me my big toe! [*The LIEUTENANT laughs.*]

ELLA.

[*Going to her aid.*] Poor Vainbetty. I'll bind it on again for you!

GOODWIFE.

[*On her knees to the PRINCE.*] Forgive me, Prince. It was my desire to see my elder daughter married first. But here stands the real owner of the slipper, Scratchcatty, who appeared as Lady Ella at your ball!

PRINCE.

Let her prove it, try the slipper on.

SCRATCHCATTY.

I never can cram my foot into it!

GOODWIFE.

[*With the knife.*] Here; I'll slice your heel off! [*She does so.*] Now, gentlemen. [*The GENTLEMEN fit the slipper on SCRATCHCATTY'S foot.*] You see?

SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Sticking her foot out.*] You see!

PRINCE.

[*Sighing.*] I see. Array the future Princess for the marriage ceremony! [*The LADIES array SCRATCHCATTY in the royal garments taken from VAINBETTY, and the PRINCE offers her his arm.*]

SCRATCHCATTY.

Good-bye Mother, and Sister. I daresay I shall see you at the palace on visitors' days. Now, Prince; let us be trotting! [*Trumpets sound, and the procession starts as before. Again a commotion and a pause.*]

ELLA.

[*Listening.*] What say my doves and pigeons?
Hopping, skipping, like a toad,
Blood the bride leaves on the road.
Prince, your choice you'll surely rue,
Since her foot fits not the shoe!

[*The procession returns, as before. The NEIGHBORS repeat the rhyme, deriding SCRATCHCATTY.*]

SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Hopping about, moans with pain.*] I confess! I confess everything! Prince, take your slipper. And, please, Mother, hand me that slice of heel you pared off! Oh-oh! [*The COUNSELOR laughs.*]

ELLA.

[*Going to her aid.*] There, there. Poor Scratchcatty. I'll bind it on for you!

PRINCE.

[*Preparing to depart.*] Where do we seek now, gentlemen? For seek I will, until I find the true owner of this slipper and my heart.

HERALD.

There is still a marriageable daughter in this house, Your Royal Highness, according to the latest census. Eh, Magpie?

MAGPIE.

Correct.

GOODWIFE.

Nothing of the sort. These talking birds—I never did believe in educating birds in the higher branches!

PRINCE.

Where is this other daughter?

GOODWIFE.

[*Raging about.*] I tell you, there is no other! There's only the kitchen-wench, a mere scullion. A nobody! Now don't you contradict me, or I'll turn you out of my house! [*To the GOODMAN who is trying vainly to protest.*] I shall never hold up my head at Goodwives' Gatherings, if this gets known! There's no one here but Cinderella! why don't you support me? [*To her DAUGHTERS.*] Tell them she's only the ash-heap sifter, Cinderella.

VAINBETTY.

[*Crying.*] Cendril—I can't. My toe hurts me so, and she has been so kind.

SCRATCHCATTY.

[*Crying.*] Aschen—— I can't. My heel hurts me so, and she has been so kind.

DAME TRULY.

Come, come. I want my coffee.

PRINCE.

[*Looking at her in surprise.*] Auntie! What are you doing here?

DAME TRULY.

Looking after my god-daughter, daughter of the good-man here, and of his first and more agreeable wife, my niece, Ella.

PRINCE.

[*Dreamily.*] Ella. The Lady Ella! My heart told me I should find her here. And yet——

DAME TRULY.

Better use your eyes, my dear Affability. Where's the mate to that slipper, Ella?

ELLA.

[*Takes it from her bosom.*] Here, godmother! [*She looks with bashful pleasure, at the PRINCE.*]

PRINCE.

[*Catching sight of ELLA for the first time.*] It is . . . it is She! Oh, my Lady! [*Advances toward her, places her in a chair, removes her wooden shoes, and fits on the dancing-slippers, amid general delight which only the*

GOODWIFE *does not share in. Meanwhile the birds, assisted by neighbors, sing:]*

Right and left, or left and right:
Now the slipper finds its mate,
And, as morning conquers night,
Love shall conquer scorn and hate.

Love hath sought, and love hath found
Who alone the shoe can wear.
Let the merry bride-bells sound
Blssings on ye, royal pair!

Fitted to the foot the shoe,
Go in courage on your ways,
Seeking, aye, and finding, too,
Happy-ever-after days!

[The CURTAIN falls, then rises again, disclosing ELLA, now in bridal array, standing with the PRINCE, the others grouped about. Only the GOODWIFE sits apart, her DAUGHTERS near her, on the hearth, the cinder-sifter on her head, trying to peel the pumpkin.]

BLUEBEARD

An averted Tragedy in three Acts.

CHARACTERS.

BLUEBEARD, a merchant of Constantinople.

BLUEBEARD'S servants, AZIZ and ZUZU.

BLUEBEARD'S earlier wives: HALIMA, KHADIJAH, AMINA,
HAIDEE, ZULEIKA and SHARAZAD.

BLUEBEARD'S seventh wife, FATIMA.

FATIMA'S brothers: HASSAM and MUSTAPHA.

FATIMA'S childhood-sweetheart, AHMET.

FATIMA'S sister, ANNE.

LADIES of the neighborhood: ZOBEIDE, SEKINE and PERA.

Also

TURKISH PATROL and NEIGHBORS.

Also TURKISH PATROL and NEIGHBORS.

ACT I takes place in a room in the women's quarters in
BLUEBEARD'S house, ACTS II and III in the garden.

BLUEBEARD

ACT I

A room furnished and equipped in Oriental fashion. A cushioned bench against the wall and a divan supply the place of chairs. The ladies also sit on cushions, on the floor. Low stands are used as tables. The walls are decorated, or covered with tapestries. There are flower-baskets, vases of flowers, and incense-burners about. On one side a door opens into a hall. On the other side windows open to an enclosed garden.

Before the CURTAINS are drawn the NEIGHBORS: ZOBEIDE, SEKINE and PERA, enter, and, facing the AUDIENCE, sing the song BLUEBEARD:

SONG. BLUEBEARD.

Bluebeard married seven wives:

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven;

Married them to take their lives,

Send them one by one to Heaven!

Did you ever! [*One to another*]

No, I never!

Can such naughty, naughty husbands be!

None could soften temper surly.
Wed them often, killed them early!
Deary me, O deary me!

Bluebeard had a secret room,
Kept it under lock and key ;
There six spouses met their doom,
All through curiosity !
O good gracious !
How audacious !
Can such naughty, naughty husbands be ?
Nearly seven handsome ladies
Sent to Heaven or to Hades,
Just for curiosity !

Bluebeard sent, by artful tricks,
Half-a-dozen wives to Heaven :
Number one to number six,
But he met his match in seven !
Really, truly ?
Bearded bluely,
Can such naughty, naughty husbands be ?
Monster gory, seventh wooing
Tells your story of undoing,
As you'll see, as you will see !

The CURTAINS are drawn. The THREE turn toward
scene.

ZOBEIDE.

[*Exclaims with delighted surprise.*] Sekine, Pera,

see! The door stands wide. The door of Bluebeard's house!

SEKINE.

The house of mystery!

PERA.

The house of seven wives!

ALL.

[*With a shudder, hugging themselves.*] Ah-h-h!

ZOBEIDE.

Come. No one is looking. Let's explore! [*She leads the way, while the others follow cautiously. She claps hands with delight.*] At last! At last I set foot inside Bluebeard's house!

SEKINE.

The house of mystery!

PERA.

The house of seven wives!

ALL.

Ah-h-h!

SEKINE.

But shall we ever set foot outside it again?

ZOBEIDE.

Oh, my dear ; we're safe. We're not Bluebeard's wives,
Allah be praised !

SEKINE.

Allah be praised, indeed !

PERA.

Allah be praised, indeed, and truly, if you both say so.
Yet they say that Bluebeard-Bey is the greatest catch in
all Constantinople !

ZOBEIDE.

The greatest wife-catcher, without a doubt.

SEKINE.

Certainly the greatest lady-killer !

ALL.

[*Shudder, hugging themselves.*] Ah-h-h !

PERA.

Yet they say that every time he loses a wife Zobeide
here sends him a peppermint heart, saying she'd like to
be his little Bluebeardess !

ZOBEIDE.

[*Indignant.*] I? Pera, it's not true. Sekine, tell her
it's not true !

SEKINE.

Of course it's not true ! And yet, Zobeide, can we
blame you, an old maid of fourteen ?

ZOBEIDE.

Well, you must admit that with his deserts, and oases and camels and date-palms, not to speak of his bathing establishment and jewelry business, Bluebeard-Bey can well afford to keep a wife!

SEKINE.

Certainly much better than that wretched Peter, Peter, Pumpkin-Eater, who had a wife but couldn't keep her.

PERA.

That is, not till he put her in a pumpkin shell.

ZOBEIDE.

After the greedy thing had eaten out all the pumpkin. And even then we have only his own word for it that from there on he kept her very well! No, no; give me Bluebeard for keeps!

PERA.

Since he can so well afford to keep a wife, why does he never keep one? Tell me that! Why do all his wives vanish, one after the other, by the dark of the moon?

SEKINE.

That is the mystery.

ZOBEIDE.

The blood-curdling, hair-on-ending, goose-skinning mystery!

ALL.

Ah-h-h!

PERA.

I wonder if the new one knows about the other six?

ZOBEIDE.

Fatima? Not likely. She's from the country, you know!

SEKINE.

Wouldn't it be kind to give her a hint? Just to put her on her guard!

ZOBEIDE.

Of course. As good neighbors it's our duty to tell her the worst!

PERA.

But we don't know the worst!

ZOBEIDE.

No matter! We must tell it, all the same!

SEKINE.

It's our solemn duty, as good neighbors! Don't all grown-ups do it? Whenever my mother calls upon a bride she begins, "Now, my dear, while I would not for the world alarm you, yet I think you ought to know——" Then, buzz-buzz-buzz!

ZOBEBIDE.

All the stylish ladies that come to call on my grandmother do the same. Only they start in, "Not that I believe a word of it, myself, but they do say——" Then, buzz-buzz-buzz!

PERA.

I'm just a little orphan. I haven't any nice, ladylike relations to make things unpleasant for other people, alas!

THE OTHERS.

Poor lamb!

PERA.

Well, I must take their place. I must do what my dear mother and aunts would do, were they not in Paradise. Let me see: how shall I begin!—— I have it! "My dear, while I shrink from being the bearer of unpleasant news, yet——" Buzz-buzz-buzz!

THE OTHERS.

That's it!

ALL.

Buzz-buzz-buzz-zz-zz!

FATIMA.

[*In the hall.*] What a buzzing! Listen, Anne!

ANNE.

I hear distinctly. Buzz-zz-zz! [FATIMA and ANNE enter.]

ZOBEIDE.

Sh! Here comes Fatima now!

FATIMA.

A swarm of bees must have settled in the house.

ANNE.

Bees? They may be wasps, or hornets!

FATIMA.

Whatever they are we must summon slaves to chase them out. Anything that buzzes is sure to sting!

THE THREE NEIGHBORS.

The i-dea!

FATIMA.

[*Seeing them.*] What's this! Strangers?

ZOBEIDE.

Neighbors, dear Mrs. Bluebeard. Or mayn't I call you Fatima? Neighbors who would be friends. I am Zobeide; this is Sekine, and this Pera.

SEKINE AND PERA.

Salutations!

FATIMA.

You are kindly welcome. This is my sister Anne.

THE THREE.

Salutations, lady-sister.

ANNE.

Salutations, neighbor-ladies.

FATIMA.

Consider yourselves at home. You will find these cushions comfortable. [*All sit.*] Allow me to offer you refreshments. [*Claps hands.*]

ZOBEIDE.

Oh, we couldn't think of troubling you.

SEKINE.

[*In undertone, tugging ZOBEIDE's sleeve.*] Oh, yes we could!

FATIMA.

No trouble at all. [*SLAVES enter.*] Bring refreshments! [*SLAVES bow and go.*]

ZOBEIDE.

I protest, now; we are neither hungry nor thirsty.

SEKINE.

[*Tugging ZOBEIDE's sleeve.*] Oh, yes, we are! Pera, tell her that we are!

PERA.

Indeed and truly I am a little hungry and thirsty both!

ZOBEIDE.

I'm ashamed of you two! Do you not know that in polite society one always refuses food first, then accepts

it, as a condescension toward the hostess! Always pretend you do not want it when you know you are going to get it!

FATIMA.

[*As the SLAVES bring trays of refreshments.*] Do try this sherbet! Cannot I tempt you with these little cakes?

SEKINE.

[*Hurriedly.*] Really, I couldn't touch a morsel!

PERA.

Nor I, indeed and truly!

FATIMA.

[*To the SLAVES.*] Then take away the trays!

THE THREE.

[*As the SLAVES prepare to obey, alarmed.*] Oh! [*Half rising from their cushions.*]

ZOBEIDE.

Since you are so insistent I will take just a bite and sup for neighborliness!— Don't overdo things, stupids! [*In an undertone to her COMPANIONS.*] She comes from the country, or she never would have taken us at our word! [*ALL eat and drink. The SLAVES stand, with folded arms, near door.*]

ANNE.

[*After a slight pause.*] Somebody ought to say something to someone! Just for manners! [*To FATIMA.*]

FATIMA.

[*Eating with gusto.*] Well, then, why don't you say it?

ANNE.

[*Eating with gusto.*] You are the hostess. Besides, I'm busy!

FATIMA.

[*With mouth full.*] So am I! One has to set one's guests an example. Not that they need it, greedy things!

SEKINE.

[*To ZOBEIDE and PERA.*] Someone ought really to say something! [*With mouth full.*]

ZOBEIDE.

[*Eating with gusto.*] Why don't you say it then?

SEKINE.

Let Pera do it! Or why not tell Fatima now about, you know! The other six!

ZOBEIDE.

[*With mouth full.*] Tell her yourself. My mouth is occupied.

SEKINE.

[*With mouth full.*] So is mine.

ZOBEIDE.

Then let Pera do it!

SEKINE.

Yes, yes, Pera ; you do it !

PERA.

[*With mouth full.*] Do what ?

SEKINE.

Tell Fatima. Delicately, of course. About, you know !
The other six !

PERA.

I can't. I'm the smallest. I have to eat the hardest to
keep up with the rest !

ANNE.

I'm sure I've read in a French book of politeness that
someone ought to do something to fill up the gaps and
pauses.

FATIMA.

That's what I'm doing : filling up the gaps and pauses
in my system. [*ALL eat and drink.*]

ZOBEIDE.

I think I can start things now. Delicately, of course !
I'll ask her how she likes Constantinople ! [*Addresses*
FATIMA, *mouth full.*] And how do you like Constanti-
nople ?

FATIMA.

I beg your pardon ?

SEKINE.

Zobeide says, "And how do you like Constantinople?"

FATIMA.

I didn't quite catch——?

PERA.

Sekine says Zobeide says, "And how do you like Constantinople?"

FATIMA.

You asked——?

ZOBEIDE.

Pera says Sekine says Zobeide—that's me—I—says—
And how do you like Constantinople?

THE THREE.

And how do you like Constantinople?

FATIMA.

Oh, Constantinople—with its bazaars and bargains—
my idea of Paradise!

ALL.

Oh, the bazaars—the bargains! Paradise!

ANNE.

Of course, there are bazaars in Paradise, or where
would the angels buy new feathers for their wings. But
do you believe there are bargains there?

FATIMA.

If not it wouldn't be Paradise!

THE OTHERS.

How true! [*Another pause for refreshments.*]

SEKINE.

[*Suddenly cries out.*] Oh!

THE OTHERS.

Sekine! What is it?

SEKINE.

I have a pain!

THE OTHERS.

A pain! Where?

SEKINE.

[*Rubbing stomach.*] In the place—you know—that everybody feels and nobody says.

ZOBEIDE AND PERA.

[*Reproving.*] Sekine!

FATIMA.

Can I offer you anything besides polite condolences?

ANNE.

I'm sure I've read somewhere that there's something one ought to do for it; fasting, or something!

SEKINE.

[*Hurriedly.*] I'm better now!

FATIMA.

Can't I press something more on you? A little cake, or sherbet?

PERA.

Oh, yes, yes! Do press something more on me!

ZOBEIDE AND SEKINE.

[*Reproving.*] Pera!

FATIMA.

If I really cannot persuade you to allow me to press anything more upon you—— Remove these emptinesses! [*To the SLAVES, indicating the dishes, etc. The SLAVES obey.*]

PERA.

I'm an emptiness, myself! At least, a partial one!

ZOBEIDE AND SEKINE.

Pera! What manners!

SEKINE.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a fresh tray and start all over again. One always does better the second time, you know!

ZOBEIDE AND PERA.

Sekine!

FATIMA.

And now, what? Shall we play games? Puss-in-the-corner, or cat's cradle.

ANNE.

April Fool. Let's play April Fool.

ZOBEIDE.

But it isn't April.

SEKINE.

April has been and gone!

PERA.

April hasn't come yet!

ANNE.

We can make believe it is the First of April. And I am IT!

FATIMA.

[*Reproving.*] Anne! Perhaps the ladies would like to see my wedding presents!

THE THREE.

Oh, yes; the wedding presents! [FATIMA *claps hands.*]

ZOBEIDE.

[*In undertone to SEKINE and PERA.*] This is our opportunity! [SLAVES *enter.*]

FATIMA.

Bring my wedding presents. [SLAVES *bow low, and go.*]

ZOBEIDE.

We would have brought you a wedding present, only we feared it would not last long enough to be worth while.

FATIMA.

What! Are your gifts of such perishable nature?

ZOBEIDE.

Oh, that's not what we mean!

SEKINE.

No, indeed!

PERA.

No, indeed and truly! Oh, no!

THE THREE.

We mean—— [They stop short. SLAVES *enter, bearing baskets which they set down, then go, at a sign from FATIMA.*]

FATIMA.

Come, Anne; help me to play showman. The things I brought from home I pass over—poor offerings from relations.

ANNE.

Offerings from poor relations.

THE NEIGHBORS.

Poor offerings from poor relations!

FATIMA.

These are the treasures my Bluebeard lavished on his little Fatima!

ZOBEIDE.

[*In an undertone.*] And on how many before her!

SEKINE.

Ha, ha!

PERA.

Ah, ha, ha, ha!

FATIMA.

This kaftan, cloth of gold—made for a Sultana, but bought in at a sale by Bluebeard for his little Fatima!

ZOBEIDE.

[*Aside, to SEKINE and PERA.*] Part of the trousseau of Halima, his first!

FATIMA.

This donalma, as you see, studded with priceless emeralds—as Bluebeard puts it, for Fatima 'tis an everyday affair!

SEKINE.

Oh, a very everyday affair! Khadijah, his second, used to go to market in it! [*The THREE laugh.*]

FATIMA.

This girdle of rubies beyond price— [*Holding up girdle.*]

PERA.

[*Aside.*] Belonged to Amina, his third!

FATIMA.

As my Bluebeard said when he clasped it on, simple but becoming!

ZOBEBIDE.

Oh, very simple, ha, ha! As for becoming— 'Tis becoming quite an old story in Constantinople!

THE THREE.

Ha, ha, ha!

FATIMA.

These bracelets— But, plain gold, you would not care for those!

PERA.

Oh, yes, yes, indeed and truly! I always liked those bracelets!

SEKINE.

[*Aside.*] I remember them. They came with Haidee, his fourth!

PERA.

No, no. With his fifth, Zuleika!

SEKINE.

I assure you they were Haidee's, first. My father sold them to Bluebeard. I remember the way they haggled over the price.

ZOBEIDE.

What has become of the pearls? The string that belonged to his sixth, Sharazad, you know! [*To SEKINE and PERA.*] I have always wanted a good look at those pearls!

FATIMA.

You wish to see my pearls? [*Holds up a string of pearls.*] But, though they cost a Sultan's ransom, as my Bluebeard says, after all they are only pearls!

ZOBEIDE.

[*Examining the pearls.*] You are sure? Because imitations often look more like pearls than pearls do!

ANNE.

[*Aside to FATIMA, indicating ZOBEIDE.*] Jealous cat!

SEKINE.

Real or imitation, how I should love to have a string of pearls like that. Because it would always make me think of oysters raw, stewed, or fried!

ANNE.

If they were only imitation pearls I should think they would only remind you of imitation oysters!

ZOBEIDE.

Well, real or imitation, it has been most pleasant to renew old acquaintances!

SEKINE.

Old friends, rather. Yes, indeed.

PERA.

Yes, indeed and truly, since my elders say so. Truly and indeed.

ZOBEIDE.

And, believe me, Fatima, we wish you all happiness, for so long as it may last.

SEKINE.

May it last longer than some other happinesses we could mention.

PERA.

One happiness or another is bound to be the last. Why not yours?

FATIMA AND ANNE.

[*Puzzled, one to the other.*] Whatever do they mean?

FATIMA.

Horrid things, they're jealous! I fear you must excuse

me. It is my hour for twiddling my thumbs and yawning, the way well-bred women are expected to do in Constantinople—married women, I should say!

THE GUESTS.

Oh, my dear—— Really, now! We are not in any hurry!

FATIMA.

Must you stay? Can't you go? Well, if you mustn't and can, or cannot and must—— [*Claps hands.*] Your litters, doubtless, wait without. Your slaves are in attendance. [*SLAVES enter.*] Show these ladies the attractive view from our front doorstep!

THE GUESTS.

[*Nudging one another.*] Ahem! Tell her now.

ZOBEIDE.

Farewell, Fatima! May it be a painless one. Ahem.

SEKINE.

If I were in your shoes, Fatima, I should eat and drink all I could while I could. For you don't know what you'll get in Paradise. Probably just health-food and nutritious things.

ANNE.

I should think angels would be fed on bird-seed, for the upkeep of their wings! [*The GUESTS smother laughter.*]

FATIMA.

[*Reproving.*] Anne! There's nothing like that in the Koran!

ANNE.

All the same I don't see why you're in such a hurry to send my sister to Paradise!

ZOBEIDE.

Oh, it is not we who are in a hurry! Ahem!

SEKINE.

No, indeed. Ahem-hem.

PERA.

Ahem-hem-hem, since my elders say so. Indeed and truly, ahem!

ALL THREE.

Ahem.

FATIMA.

You have fishbones in your throats?

ANNE.

Or wishbones! That's it; wishbones.

FATIMA.

[*To SLAVES.*] Bring water. Slap their Excellencies on the back! [*SLAVES slap the GUESTS on the back. The GUESTS cry out.*]

ZOBEIDE.

Really, it's not necessary.

SEKINE.

Not necessary at all.

PERA.

Not at all, at all.

ALL THREE.

[*Starting toward door.*] Farewell, Fatima. Good-morrow, Anne. *You* may have a morrow.

FATIMA.

Wait. [*To the SLAVES.*] For the present, go. [SLAVES *obey.*] Now. So far you have only buzzed. Now sting!

THE GUESTS.

Oh, my dear——! [*They stop short.*]

FATIMA.

Go on. Do your disagreeablest!

ZOBEIDE.

Now, now, my dear; while I would not for the world alarm you, yet I think you ought to know——

SEKINE.

Oh, Zobeide; I was to say that. Yours was, "Not that I believe a word of it, myself, but they do say——"

PERA.

That's right. And mine is, "My dear; while I shrink from being the bearer of unpleasant news——"

FATIMA.

[*Who, with ANNE, has been listening with ever-increasing pleasure.*] Anne, Anne! Hear that!

ANNE.

Oh, sister! Isn't it wonderful! [FATIMA and ANNE jump up and down, clapping hands joyously.]

FATIMA.

Oh, if you knew how much at home that makes me feel!

ANNE.

Just what mother says when she goes calling!

FATIMA.

And grandma!

ANNE.

And all our aunts and great-aunts.

FATIMA.

And all the ladies who come calling. Oh, we have been brought up on that neighborly refrain, Buzz-buzz-zz-zz!

ALL.

Buzz-buzz-zz-zz-zz!

FATIMA.

And, of course, everyone knows there's nothing in it. That is, unless it's about other people. Never about yourself!

THE OTHERS.

How true!

FATIMA.

But, come. Sit down again. Let us be comfortable!
[Sits.]

ZOBEIDE.

[Sitting.] Comfortable! Poor lamb!

SEKINE AND PERA.

[Sitting.] Poor lamb! Comfortable!

ANNE.

Comfortable? Poor creatures! With those uncomfortable faces!

FATIMA.

[Reproving.] Anne! One should only disparage faces behind backs!

SEKINE.

If there's nothing left to eat can't we chew gum while we talk scandal?

ZOBEIDE AND PERA.

[Reproving.] Sekine!

FATIMA.

Make it spicy, so that I may entertain my lord with it, my Bluebeard!

THE GUESTS.

[*Gasping.*] Now, by the crescent moon of Turkey——!

ZOBEIDE.

You dear. Really I must kiss you! [*Kisses FATIMA'S cheek.*] Won't it be a shame to lose her?

SEKINE.

Yes, indeed!

PERA.

Indeed, and truly, it will! Still what must be, must!

ZOBEIDE AND SEKINE.

Of course. That is the Turkish alphabet!

ANNE.

There they go again! I tell you, you can't lose our family. I myself sometimes lose my head, that's all. But only for the moment!

FATIMA.

Come, come; scandal! Scandal hot and spicy that I may serve up to my lord, my Bluebeard!

THE GUESTS.

Bluebeard! Oh, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!

ZOBEIDE.

Bluebeard! Ha, ha! Forgive me, Fatima. But when you talk that way I simply can't keep a straight face.

FATIMA.

You are to be forgiven. No one can keep straight what Nature has made crooked! Well?

SEKINE.

You see, it is about Bluebeard.

FATIMA.

About my lord—my Bluebeard!

SEKINE.

I do so hate to tell you.

FATIMA.

But you'll tell me all the same. That is, if I permit you to. Which I do not!

THE GUESTS.

Eh?

FATIMA.

I do not. [*Puts fingers in ears.*] Not one word. Not one syllable. Not one breath!

ZOBEIDE.

'Fraid cat. 'Fraid cat!

FATIMA.

[*Removing fingers.*] How dare you call me 'fraid cat!— I mean— I can't hear a thing you say! [*Puts fingers in ears again.*]

ANNE.

Tell me. Oh, somebody tell me something, anything!

FATIMA.

Anne, I forbid you to listen to such gossips! Silence, and begone!

ZOBEBIDE.

Oh, well, if this is all the gratitude we meet we may as well go! Come, Sekine, Pera!

SEKINE.

She'll hear it, sooner or later. Bluebeard's wife—it's an old story in Constantinople!

ANNE.

The idea of your calling my sister an old story! We're the newest family in Turkey! So there!

PERA.

[*Who has been poking about the room.*] I see some of the things we sent to the others. Can't we take them back?

SEKINE.

By all means let us take them back. They'll do for the next one.

PERA.

Since my elders and wisers decide to take things back, who am I to oppose them? [*They take articles, and prepare to go.*]

FATIMA.

Stop! What are you doing? Leave my things alone.

SEKINE.

[*With rug.*] Your things? My dear! My own mother bought this, but when she found she had been cheated in the transaction by Selim the rug-merchant she sent it to your Bluebeard's first!

FATIMA.

My Bluebeard's first!

ANNE.

Her Bluebeard's first!

SEKINE.

Here's the place where I spilt coffee on it. See for yourself. That's why that mean Selim wouldn't exchange it.

FATIMA.

But, you spoke of his first!

SEKINE.

This rug would only remind you of her! That's why I'm taking it away!

FATIMA.

[*Hands to head, bewildered.*] His first!

ZOBEIDE.

This flower-basket was sent to my grandmother, and as she had one just like it, and didn't want it, anyway, she sent it to Bluebeard's second!

FATIMA.

His second! My husband's second!

ANNE.

My sister's husband's second!

PERA.

This wee sweetmeat dish that nobody would miss—I myself brought it from the house where I was visiting for Bluebeard's third!

FATIMA.

His third! Bluebeard's third! Anne's brother-in-law's third!

ANNE.

Oh, put him off on me; do! My brother-in-law's third!

ZOBEIDE.

Haidee, the Greek girl, was his fourth!

FATIMA.

His fourth! That bluebearded person's fourth!

ANNE.

That hideous, bluebearded person's fourth!

PERA.

Those bracelets—whenever she passed in a litter I used to see them on the arms of his fifth, Zuleika.

SEKINE.

I tell you, Pera, he bought them from my father. I remember, because my father was so proud of having sold them for twice their value, but Bluebeard got even with him by paying half the price in bad money. They were for his fourth.

PERA.

At any rate it was his fifth who wore them.

FATIMA.

His fifth. That matrimonial multiplication-table person's fifth!

ANNE.

His fifth! I always hated arithmetic, and now I know why! Oh, dear; oh, dear; I never supposed we should have it in the family!

ZOBEIDE.

How the neighborhood envied Sharazad her pearls. She was his sixth.

FATIMA.

Oh! Sharazad was his sixth, was she! That monster's sixth!

ANNE.

That bloodthirsty monster's sixth! Thank Heaven he's no relation; only a connection by marriage!

FATIMA.

His sixth. But go on. I have ten fingers, if you include the thumbs. I have learned to count up to ten.

THE GUESTS.

That's all.

FATIMA.

That is all, is it?

ANNE.

[*Moans.*] All, all!

FATIMA.

And now learn that I have known about it all along! [*The GUESTS exclaim, incredulous.*] All about all Bluebeard's wives all along. Haven't I, Anne?

ANNE.

Yes, sister. No, sister! I don't know, sister!

FATIMA.

When Bluebeard-Bey besought my parents for my hand he took me aside and, going down on his knees as far

as his girth permitted, he said, "Oh, clove-blossom, cinnamon-stick, my stag-eyed Fatima, I must confess." "Hold, my good, bluebearded lord," I interrupted him. Didn't I, Anne?

ANNE.

No, sister. Yes, sister. Of course, if you say so, sister!

FATIMA.

My very words. "Hold, my good bluebearded lord. Your past is your own. All your pasts are your own, so long as I only have your presents!" [*Suddenly breaks down.*] And you can take back your damaged rugs, and superfluous flower-baskets, and inferior sweetmeat dishes—and I won't wear the things he bought for his first, and his second and his Haidee and his Sadie and all the rest of the horrid lot! I won't, I won't, I won't! [*Flings things away from her.*] I won't, so there! And, oh, was ever a little country-Turkish maiden so cruelly deceived. Oh, dear, oh, dear! Oh, Anne! [*Goes into hysterics on ANNE'S shoulder.*]

THE OTHERS.

Poor dear. There, there! I wouldn't either!

ZOBEIDE.

I wouldn't! Not I!

SEKINE.

No, indeed, I wouldn't! No, in-deed!

PERA.

I wouldn't! Indeed and truly I wouldn't! Truly and indeed! [*The THREE whisper, apart.*]

FATIMA.

[*Recovering slightly. To ANNE.*] They would, though. Every one of them, if only they could get the chance!

ANNE.

I believe they would.

FATIMA.

Well, then, they won't get the chance!

ANNE.

I don't know what to say. I told you all along you had better have married young Ahmet.

FATIMA.

But Ahmet has only three camels, and the expectation of a herd of elephants when his uncle dies! How could I keep house and dress in the style I like on three camels and the expectation of a herd of elephants?

ANNE.

There's something in that! All the same with Ahmet you would have been first and last!

FATIMA.

After all, does it matter if one is not first so long as one is last? Someone has to be last, with Bluebeard. Why not I?

ANNE.

There's something in that. All the same how long will the last last? I've heard of shoemakers sticking to their last, but Bluebeard is not a shoemaker!

FATIMA.

My mind is quite made up, so do not be a wet blanket, Anne!

ANNE.

Fatima! You know there are no blankets in our family!

FATIMA.

[*To the NEIGHBORS who are whispering, apart.*] Ahem! I thoroughly appreciate the disinterested motives which have led you to unmask my beloved husband's villainy, and I have decided to act upon the information! [*The OTHERS exclaim, approving.*]

ZOBEIDE.

Count on our assistance, Fatima! Will you poison his coffee, stab him in his sleep, or merely have him sewn up in a sack and cast into the Bosphorus?

SEKINE.

Oh, poison, by all means! A slow, lingering death, while we chant hymns of rejoicing!

PERA.

Oh, cast him into the Bosphorus, by all means, because then we can fish him out, revive him with a pulmotor,

and marry him! Oh, I didn't mean to say that! [*Wilts under the scorn of ZOBEIDE.*]

ZOBEIDE.

Must you always spoil every good plan with your babbling tongue?

SEKINE.

Boiling oil is a humorous sort of punishment. Every time he rises to the surface we could push him back!

PERA.

[*Clapping hands.*] Oh, yes. Boiling-oiling-oil!

FATIMA.

None of these counsels fits the case! What, lose the insurance on his life? I am a country girl, but even in rural districts we are not without an eye to the main chance!

SEKINE.

Why not run away? We'll put you up a little lunch of dates, figs, sweetmeats, and other sustaining things.

PERA.

You must write a letter to Bluebeard and leave it on the pincushion, or in his razor case!

FATIMA.

His Excellency does not shave. Besides, do you think I would so put myself in the wrong, in the eyes of the law? Never! Mrs. Bluebeard I am, and Mrs. Bluebeard

I intend to stay, for so long as I may find it suits me!
 [*The OTHERS exclaim with involuntary admiration.*]

ZOBEIDE.

Fatima, once I had a strange dream—one in which women were equal with men, in the eyes of the law!
 [*The OTHERS exclaim, as if this were incredible.*] Yes, I know you'll laugh. But it was only a dream. Yet, somehow—— Who knows! Who knows! [*Passes hand across brow.*] However, your independent spirit wins my admiration. An end to neighborly buzzing and stinging. Count me your friend, your ally.

SEKINE.

And me.

PERA.

And me.

FATIMA.

I thank you! From my heart I thank you. [*Holds out her hands to the GUESTS who grasp them.*] I am the seventh. Seven is a lucky number. With your help I shall win out! Here we go round the mulberry bush. [*They begin to dance in a circle.*]

ANNE.

We're going round, but I don't see any mulberry bush!

FATIMA.

[*Pushing ANNE into the centre of the ring.*] You be

the mulberry bush!— So early in the morning. [BLUEBEARD'S *voice is heard in the garden.*]

ALL.

Hush! Listen! [*They stand still, listening.* BLUEBEARD'S *song is heard faintly.*]

FATIMA.

'Tis he, warbling the serenade he made for me! Oh, how I have loved him with his beautiful blue beard, the only one of that exact shade in Turkey! Oh, how can a man be a villain who has written such a song, an inspiration, as he describes it, direct from Heaven! [*The NEIGHBORS laugh at this.*]

ZOBEIDE.

Oh, my dear; the whole quarter knows it by heart. Bluebeard stole it from a young merchant who composed it to his love under the stars while crossing the desert with his camels. He has sung it to each of his wives in turn.

SEKINE.

To Halima, Khadijah, Amina——

PERA.

Haidee, Zuleika and Sharazad!

FATIMA.

[*In a jealous rage, on divan, face downward, beating cushions, drumming with feet, etc.*] Halima, Khadijah, Amina, Haidee, Zuleika and Sharazad! Ah-h-h-!

THE OTHERS.

Poor lamb! [*Consoling her.*] The brute. The wretch!
The unutterable monster!

FATIMA.

[*Sitting up.*] Well, he shall pay for it! Pay dearly for his Halima, Khadijah, Amina, Haidee, Zuleika and Sharazad! [*Beats cushions in time with names.*] Can someone lend me a rabbit's foot? [*Rising, and adjusting hair. The OTHERS hurriedly feel in pockets.*]

ANNE.

What for? For luck?

FATIMA.

[*Taking rabbit's foot from one of those held out to her, and making up face before mirror.*] Oh, no woman need worry about luck who puts the right face upon a situation!

THE OTHERS.

[*Admiringly.*] How true! [*BLUEBEARD'S song, heard nearer.*]

SONG. ' LUMP OF TURKISH DELIGHT.

Sung by BLUEBEARD.

Sultana, O queen of my soul!
O pearl in my turban clasp'd tight,
O quest of my Turkish Patrol!
O Lump of Turkish Delight!

Fair Fatima fortissima, be not disdainful!

My heart within my breast is very, very painful!

Let us live, the gladdest couple,

In Constanti-nanti-nople.

In Constanti-nanti-nanti-nanti-nanti-nanti-nople!

O lalala! Lalala, la, la!

O Lump of Turkish Delight!

O blade of my bright scimitar!

A camel am I in your sight,

A slave to the houri you are,

O Lump of Turkish Delight!

Fair Fatima fortissima, list not so coldly!

Ne'er bulbul on the bough sang to a rose more boldly!

Though the night be black and murky,

Shine, O star of Turkey-urkey!

Crescent moon and star of Turkey-urkey-urkey-urkey!

O lalala! Lalala, la, la!

O Lump of Turkish Delight!

ANNE.

[*Watching at window.*] Here he comes now! [*In excited whisper. At a sign from FATIMA the NEIGHBORS hide behind the tapestries of the wall. ANNE sits on a cushion in a corner, and embroiders. FATIMA lies on the divan and pretends to sleep. BLUEBEARD appears at the window, and sings song, "LUMP OF TURKISH DELIGHT," accompanying himself on some stringed instrument. At close of song FATIMA affects to wake, stretching, yawning, etc.*]

BLUEBEARD.

Ha! She finds that irresistible! As all my wives have done! [*Playing a note or two, he advances, slowly, and begins song over again.*]

FATIMA.

[*Starts.*] What noise is that! Owls, peacocks, or the sharpening of slate-pencils! [*The NEIGHBORS peep forth, applauding her.*]

BLUEBEARD.

[*Amazed at her tone.*] Noise, my Sultana, my Fatima? Your ears deceive you! I was pouring forth my soul to you in song! [*Begins again.*]

FATIMA.

[*Fingers in ears.*] Please, please!

BLUEBEARD.

Now, by my scimitar! You're the first wife I ever had who was serenade-proof!

FATIMA.

[*Removing fingers. Sharply.*] Eh? What's that?

BLUEBEARD.

I said, perhaps you don't like modern music!

FATIMA.

Modern! That hackneyed old lay!

BLUEBEARD.

[*In injured tone.*] It's not an old lay. It's a strictly new lay!

FATIMA.

Hm!

BLUEBEARD.

Dedicated to you! Listen! "O Lump of Turkish De——"

FATIMA.

Bow-wow-wow! Me-ouw! Gobble-gobble-goup! [*Imitating animals.*]

BLUEBEARD.

What! [*Astounded.*] I fear I disturbed your slumbers!

FATIMA.

You did, indeed. And I was enjoying such a dream! I dreamed that I had had six husbands!

BLUEBEARD.

Fatima! Where did you get such ideas! What are young girls coming to, nowadays! Six husbands! Most improper!

FATIMA.

Six! One after another. And then I took a seventh!

BLUEBEARD.

One with a bea-u-tiful blue beard!

FATIMA.

A blue beard. But far from beautiful! [*Mimicking his tone.*]

BLUEBEARD.

[*In an injured tone.*] Fatima! Well, I love you well enough to dye for you!

FATIMA.

Oh, I'll attend to that, when I grow tired of you. But do not be alarmed. It shall be painless!

BLUEBEARD.

Dye my beard, I meant you to understand! I daresay it would take a strong purple! A Tyrian purple, poets call it! Or old rose. Or how about an orange?

FATIMA.

Perhaps. [*In indifferent tone.*]

BLUEBEARD.

Meanwhile, I warn you against dreams. Seven husbands!

FATIMA.

One after another!

BLUEBEARD.

Scandalous! It comes of this higher education, teaching women to count not only their fingers, but their toes! [*Starts toward door.*] I think I'll go have a pipe!

FATIMA.

Have it in here! [*Claps hands.*] Yes, I insist.
[*SLAVES appear.*] Bring his Excellency's hookah!
[*SLAVES bow and depart on their errand.*]

BLUEBEARD.

[*Aside; stroking his beard.*] She has spirit. Well, well, poor child, for so brief a day why not humor her! This independence is all very well, my clove-blossom, but bluebearded capitalists do not grow on the currant bushes!

FATIMA.

So much the better for the currants! [*Arranging cushions on floor. SLAVES enter with hookah.*] Go. I will serve my lord, myself! [*SLAVES bow and depart. FATIMA makes BLUEBEARD comfortable on cushions, and prepares his pipe.*] Now we can talk at our leisure. Or, rather, I can talk at our leisure! [*The LISTENERS again applaud FATIMA, unnoted by BLUEBEARD.*]

BLUEBEARD.

[*Taking pipe from mouth.*] Now, by my entombed ancestors, I protest against this domination by the inferior sex!

FATIMA.

[*Replacing pipe.*] Was I a little sharp with you just now? Don't answer. Just shake your head yes or no! [*BLUEBEARD starts to nod yes, then shakes head no.*] You see, I have been thinking things over!

BLUEBEARD.

[*Without removing pipe.*] What, so soon?

FATIMA.

Perhaps not soon enough. And I have said to myself, He swears he loves me. But does he trust me? Do I possess his entire confidence?

BLUEBEARD.

[*Removing pipe.*] Fatima, by the beards of my ancestors, I swear——

FATIMA.

[*Replacing pipe.*] Don't stop smoking. A husband always is at his best with a pipe in his mouth. He looks so wise, and has no chance to say anything foolish.

BLUEBEARD.

[*Laying down pipe.*] It doesn't draw well. In fact, you forgot to light it!

FATIMA.

Oh, dear! How neglectful! [*About to light pipe.*]

BLUEBEARD.

[*Rising.*] No matter. I have to be starting on a journey!

FATIMA.

What! My Lord would leave his Turkish delight?
[*Clinging to BLUEBEARD.*]

BLUEBEARD.

My sticky lump of fig-paste sweetness, it is needful. I have a business matter in a court of law, about an orphan whose inheritance I have sequestered to my own use. And I must be on hand early to corrupt and bribe the jurors and witnesses. The other trustee is such a thieving rascal that I have always to get ahead of him! A miserable knave that I cannot trust out of my sight!

FATIMA.

I see. But, bribery, corruption—— is that right?

BLUEBEARD.

It is customary, which is infinitely more compelling. As our proverb puts it, it is the early bird that catches the worm. And, of the two, your spouse elects to be the nobler animal, the bird! [*He moves toward the door, then pauses.*] But, come, Fatima; tit for tat. What proof have I that you value me for myself alone, my manly beauty, my exalted character, rather than for my material possessions?

FATIMA.

Oh, my Lord, if you seek proof—— This! [*Tearing off the string of pearls she throws this out of window, whereon a loud splash is heard.*]

ANNE.

[*Starts up, agitated.*] Oh! Your pearls——into the fountain! [*The concealed GUESTS exclaim, echoing ANNE'S feeling, in suppressed tones.*]

FATIMA.

The priceless pearls you fished up for your cinnamon-stick, and these bracelets that you caused to be wrought for your clove-blossom! [*Throws the bracelets after the pearls.*] Tush, Anne! You can go fish them out for me! [*Aside, to ANNE, who subsides, reassured, while the GUESTS applaud mutely.*] And this donalma studded with expensive emeralds, this girdle of rubies beyond your means, and all your other gifts!

BLUEBEARD.

[*Restraining her.*] Hold, Fatima! Hold. You must keep at least one spangle on! Lucky the pearls are but imitation! [*Aside.*] The reckless baggage! [*Wipes brow.*] The demonstration suffices. Let us consider the proof of your devotion to me complete! [*Goes toward door.*]

FATIMA.

[*Runs after him, seizes his garment.*] Wait, my Lord. My tit deserves your tat! What proof have you to offer your cinnamon-stick that she really is permanent Sultana of your heart? Come, now; tat for tit.

BLUEBEARD.

As you will. Are we alone? I don't count Anne!

ANNE.

[*Rising, indignant.*] The idea! I won't stay where I'm not counted, not even as a cipher! [*Goes out of window, but stays near, listening.*]

FATIMA.

See for yourself.

BLUEBEARD.

I ask, because all women are bitten by the winged insect, curiosity! Verily, I believe women would listen at the keyholes of Paradise!

FATIMA.

Since all angels are men it would be very improving to listen to their wisdom, wouldn't it? Even at keyholes!

BLUEBEARD.

Angels are men, my dear, but men are rarely angels. Till women get to the doors of Paradise they do well to abstain from curiosity!

FATIMA.

Ahem!

BLUEBEARD.

When I noticed those tapestries stir I wondered if those neighborhood gossips Zobeide, Sekine, and Pera, might not be concealed there!

THE THREE.

[*Emerging, indignant.*] Nothing of the sort! How dare you suspect us of such conduct! Mr. Bluebeard, you are no gentleman! [BLUEBEARD *laughs.*]

ZOBEIDE.

We won't stay where we are insulted!

BLUEBEARD.

[*Detains them, as they are about to go.*] Nay, remain! Bear witness to what confidence I repose in Fatima. [*Takes out bunch of keys, holds this up.*] Fatima, these are the keys of my house. I entrust them to you. Unlock, enter, as you will.

ALL.

Ah-h-h!

BLUEBEARD.

[*Withholds keys which FATIMA is about to take.*] Except——

ALL.

[*In a different tone.*] Ah-h-h!

BLUEBEARD.

Except the room the door of which is opened by this tiny golden key.

FATIMA.

[*Naïvely.*] Why, whatever can the room contain?

BLUEBEARD.

That is my guilty secret! [*Hands her the keys.*] Seek to pry into it, and the heavens themselves—— [*Roll of thunder heard. A vase is thrown down. All the girls cry out, startled.*] You see? The heavens themselves will avenge your treachery!

ALL.

[*Greatly impressed.*] Ah-h-h!

BLUEBEARD.

[*Going toward door.*] Farewell, my Sultana! [*He goes, singing, "LUMP OF TURKISH DELIGHT."* ALL stand a minute, looking at the keys significantly.]

FATIMA.

Let's make sure that he has really gone! Let us peep from behind the front shutters! [*Leads the way, following BLUEBEARD.*]

THE OTHERS.

Yes, yes! We must make sure! [ALL go, following FATIMA. *The two SLAVES enter at the window, one with a drum.*]

AZIZ.

Did the stage thunder work properly? [*Looks for vase, sees it, picks it up.*]

ZUZU.

[*Entering, gives drum-roll.*] Die-away storm!

AZIZ.

This new bride is a marvel. A miracle of courage.

ZUZU.

Wait till she has seen her predecessors!

AZIZ.

I doubt if even that sight will daunt her. Do you know I should not wonder if she will outwit the old tyrant, and live to be his widow! [*Confidentially.*]

ZUZU.

May the day be soon! [*They remain quiet, hearing voices. FATIMA, ANNE, and NEIGHBORS return. FATIMA, who is tearful, is being consoled by the OTHERS.*]

ZOBEIDE.

There, there, poor lamb! He is not worth a tear!
What husband is?

FATIMA.

What do you know about husbands, pray? Besides, I can't help it. He looked so distinguished with his blue beard catching the sunlight! And he did trust me with his keys.

SEKINE.

You may be sure that's only a trap to catch you in!

PERA.

Of course! The way the others all were caught!

FATIMA.

Then he won't catch me. I will not betray his confidence!

ZOBEIDE.

Not use the little golden key? He'll expect you to.
And to lie about it to him afterwards!

FATIMA.

Then I shall disappoint his expectations. I shall be faithful, and true! [*Sits, arms folded.*]

ANNE.

Really, I think that is the safest plan. Safety first!
Let discoveries discover themselves.

PERA.

Then you'll never know what's inside the room!

SEKINE.

Maybe it's a private pantry with whole cargoes of little cakes and sweets.

ANNE.

More likely the family skeleton, or even a ghost!

FATIMA.

Fiddlestrings! All the same it would be easier to be faithful and true if one could only have a peep in, first! [*Fingers keys, then takes resolve.*] But, no. After all, what proof have I that he is a monster? It is easy enough to say that he has already had six wives! If so, what has become of them?

THE NEIGHBORS.

That is the mystery.

ZOBEIDE.

Spirited away, one after another.

SEKINE.

By the dark of the moon.

PERA.

One, two, three, four, five, six, and—— Oh, no. Not yet. He hasn't done away with you, yet.

THE THREE.

Not yet!

FATIMA.

[*Uncomfortable, but plucky.*] If so, no doubt it served them right. No doubt they were the kind that couldn't be trusted with a bunch of keys! [*Walks; suddenly sees* SLAVES, *and stops.*] What are you doing in here?

SLAVES.

May it please your Excellency—— [*Stop short, frightened, teeth chattering.*]

FATIMA.

If you don't answer me truthfully I'll send for the Police, the Turkish Patrol, and have them tie you up in sacks and thrown into the Bosphorus! Oh, I may be a newlywed, but I won't stand any nonsense from slaves!

AZIZ.

Pardon, Excellency. We only came to replace what our thunder had disturbed. [*Replaces the vase which he holds.*]

FATIMA.

Your thunder? What sacrilege! Thunder comes from Heaven. What does a slave know about Heaven? Heaven is for your betters!

ZUZU.

Truly, Excellency, it is the other place we are looking forward to—where there are no employers, no betters!

AZIZ.

Aye, Excellency.

FATIMA.

I'm glad to hear that you know your catechism so well. But about this thunder——?

ZUZU.

Commanded by his Supreme Excellency, Bluebeard-Bey. Whenever he invokes the wrath of Heaven! Listen, Excellency. The Wife-Terrifier motive! [*Gives drum-roll.*]

ALL THE GIRLS.

[*Horried.*] The Wife-Terrifier motive!

ZUZU.

Oh, by no means my finest effect, Excellency. I have the Amina Quickstep in my repertory, the Halima Swan-song, the Khadijah Lament, the Haidee Farewell, the Zuleika Polka-Dotty, and the Sharazad Slumber-song! [*The GIRLS exclaim, horried.*] I've been thinking up something appropriate for your Excellency. How about a Hesitation waltz? Your Excellency seems so fond of life it might be suitable. One, two, and hesitate. Four, five, six, and hesitate!

FATIMA.

[*Shrieks, seizes drumsticks and beats the SLAVES.*] Enough, you miserable slaves of a miserable master! Hesitation me to my doom, would you? I'll hesitation you! Begone, or I'll have you chopped into little pieces and plunged into boiling oil! [*The SLAVES shriek, crying for mercy, then run off, by the window. FATIMA throws the drumsticks after them. The OTHERS have all encouraged and applauded her. She draws a long breath.*] The villain! The unutterable villain! With his hideous blue beard!

ANNE.

I said all along you had better have taken Ahmed. He is clean-shaven.

FATIMA.

But I'll outwit him! I'll avenge myself, and not alone myself, but Halima, Khadijah, Amina, Haidee, Zuleika, and Sharazad! Ha, ha, my lord Bluebeard! Seven is a lucky number, and you have Fatima to reckon with! [*Raises keys and jingles them.*]

THE OTHERS.

Bravo! Well-spoken, Fatima! May the heavens be propitious! [*ALL join hands and sing, while dancing, "BLUEBEARD MARRIED SEVEN WIVES."*]

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

The Garden. A short time after the close of ACT I. On one side is the wall of the house, overgrown with flowering vines. A door, opening outwards and downwards, leads into the house. There is a lower window, with closed shutters, also an upper window, with shutters open. At the back is a wall. At the side opposite the house there is a shrubbery. Steps, leading up to a tower, are at the back. There are statues, stone vases, etc. Toward the front is a stone bench, with cushions.

DISCOVERED, the two slaves, AZIZ and ZUZU, hiding behind vases or bushes, distant one from the other.

AZIZ.

[*Gives low whistle, speaks in whisper.*] Zuzu!

ZUZU.

Aziz! Are you there?

AZIZ.

I think so! Are you?

ZUZU.

[*Rising.*] No; I'm here!

AZIZ.

[*Going to meet him.*] Well, here am I! What are the foolhardy ones doing within? [*Indicating the house.*]

ZUZU.

Turning everything topsy-turvy! Listen! [*Laughter and snatches of the song, "BLUEBEARD," are heard within the house.*]

AZIZ.

They laugh, they sing. Evidently they haven't entered the room! The room! [*Teeth chattering.*]

ZUZU.

[*Teeth chattering.*] Not yet!

AZIZ.

Zuzu, is not this the heavenly-ordained moment for a clean flight? [*Indicates the wall.*] All the others, slaves and servants, have gone!

ZUZU.

Aziz, I blush for you! Shall we run away empty-handed? So far, all the little pickings I have collected are contemptible! Absolutely contemptible. An egg-beater and two bedroom slippers, both for the right foot. [*Produces these articles.*]

AZIZ.

I have the lefts; we can exchange! [*They exchange slippers.*] I pocketed some rather fine tea-cups, but in

my agitation sat on them! [*Throws away the pieces.*]
That leaves me only a cake or so of soap! A missionary
left it here as a sample of her ideas of civilization!

ZUZU.

You'd never spoil your skin by using that, I trust?

AZIZ.

Not while there is a woman left on earth to admire me!
But I can give it to some silly European in exchange for
something sensible!

ZUZU.

Come, then. But, stay; if the Patrol should catch us
with stolen articles about us we shall be punished as
thieves!

AZIZ.

If they catch us running away without stolen articles
they will shut us up as madmen! No, no, Zuzu; better
punishment than disgrace!

ZUZU.

Right, Aziz. Though but slaves let us keep our char-
acter! [*About to go toward wall.*]

FATIMA.

[*At upstairs window, claps hands.*] Here, slaves!
Aziz, Zuzu!

ZUZU.

Pretend we don't hear! [*They stand close against the
wall.*]

FATIMA.

Lazy rascals! [*Throws bundles of garments out of window, on the two. They cry out.*]

ANNE.

[*Coming from house, laden with garments.*] Here they are, all the time! Hiding!

FATIMA.

Of course! Plotting how to rob and run, no doubt!

AZIZ AND ZUZU.

[*Disentangling themselves from the garments, protest.*] Oh, how your Excellency wrongs your slaves! Never was such villainy further from our thoughts! [ZUBEIDE, SEKINE, and PERA come from the house, also laden with garments.]

ZUBEIDE.

Fatima is making a thorough turn-out!

SEKINE.

She is, indeed.

PERA.

Truly, and indeed! [*They throw down their bundles.*]

FATIMA.

[*Throws more things at the SLAVES.*] Hang those things out to air!

AZIZ.

We obey your Excellency!

ZUZU.

On the wings of the wind, Excellency! [*They hang the garments on bushes. FATIMA disappears from window.*]

AZIZ.

Verily this wife is a new broom!

ZUZU.

Certainly she is making a clean sweep!

ANNE.

[*Who has sunk down on cushions to rest, aroused.*]
What's that you're saying about my sister?

AZIZ.

[*Stammering with fright.*] N-nothing, Sister-Excellency!

ZUZU.

N-not a word, Excellency-in-law! We called the Highness a new broom, that's all.

AZIZ.

A new b-broom that sweeps clean! That's all!

ANNE.

You deserve to be flogged, and your tongues cut out, that's all! There are no new brooms in our family. No brooms of any age. No, nor no clean sweeps, either!

THE SLAVES.

P-pardon, a thousand times ten thousand pardons, Wife's-Relation-Excellency! [FATIMA comes from the house, munching bonbons. She carries some small articles.]

FATIMA.

All their six wardrobes, all tagged and labeled! Oh, I have all the proof I need of his villainy!

ZOBEIDE.

[Fingering a garment.] You never would wear the things! They would only bring you ill-luck!

SEKINE.

[Fingering a garment.] They wouldn't fetch you a song from the rag-picker! And you wouldn't want the neighbors to see you in them!

PERA.

[Trying on a garment.] They're not your size.

FATIMA.

[Munching bonbons.] I shall probably be generous with those I myself can't wear. I shall give them to my relations.

ANNE.

[Jumps up from her place, delighted.] Oh, sister! But do not rob yourself. Just a simple set of sables, or a diamond sunburst, as a souvenir, for me!

FATIMA.

The furs and jewels should remain in the Bluebeard family as heirlooms. But here, Anne; here's a set of handkerchiefs belonging to Amina. You can have those, initialed A! [*Gives handkerchiefs to ANNE.*] But now to the business of the day. [*Picks out the golden key on the bunch.*] Come!

THE OTHERS.

[*Overcome with fear.*] Oh, no!

FATIMA.

Oh, yes, I say. All together!

ZOBEIDE.

[*Hurriedly, about to go.*] I have an engagement. I promised my grandmother to meet her at the house of the female robber who makes our clothes.

SEKINE.

I, too, must go. I promised my mother I would juggle up her monthly accounts for her. I hoodwink my father so much more cleverly than she does!

PERA.

I had quite forgotten, I have to take a singing-lesson! A new teacher. By getting a trial lesson from every teacher in Constantinople, I am getting a wonderful musical education gratuitously!

THE THREE.

We'll drop in later to find out what you have found out!

FATIMA.

[*Detaining them.*] No, no; I cannot let you go!

ANNE.

I think, sister, if you'll excuse me, I will keep out of it. Never come between husband and wife, you know!

AZIZ AND ZUZU.

Come! Let us make our fly-by-night while we can!
[*Steal toward wall, rear.*]

FATIMA.

[*Sees them.*] Stop! Or I'll summon the Patrol! [AZIZ and ZUZU *pause, frightened.*] And you, I need you all as witnesses! . . . Come, do not be afraid. My mind is made up. I enter the secret room alone! [ALL *exclaim at her courage.*]

ANNE.

Oh, sister! But what if you never come out alive!

FATIMA.

That is my hazard! Is it not written in the sacred books that marriage is a lottery? [*Goes toward house.*] Await me here! [*Enters the house. The rest draw a long breath.*]

ZOBEIDE.

She has courage!

SEKINE AND PERA.

Courage, indeed!

ANNE.

[*Grandly.*] We come of a courageous race! My father—— May he now be enjoying the sweets of Paradise! On earth he never was afraid to run away from a superior enemy! My brave brothers, Mustapha and Hassam, success to all their enterprises! Together they never hesitate to attack any miserable jackal that single-handed, defies them! I, myself, though but that inferior being, a woman, yet at a crisis—— [*A door inside slams. She shrieks.*]

ZOBEIDE.

Only a door slammed! Ha, ha; where's your courage, Anne!

ANNE.

I tell you, I am courage itself, at a crisis! I said nothing about doors! Oh, what a turn it gave me! Oh!

SEKINE.

Ought not somebody to be keeping watch for Bluebeard? Let us all go up into the tower and watch out!

PERA.

[*Who has been examining the shuttered window.*] Isn't this the window of the secret room?

THE SLAVES.

Aye, Pera Khanoun! It is, indeed! Br-r-r! [*Frightened.*]

PERA.

Then let us watch here for Fatima while you watch out for Bluebeard!

THE OTHERS.

Excellent!

AZIZ AND ZUZU.

As your Excellencies command. But not in the tower. From the garden wall! [*The GIRLS go to the shuttered window, the SLAVES to the rear wall.*]

ZOBEIDE.

So dark, there's nothing to be seen. Wait! A key turns in the lock.

THE OTHERS.

It's Fatima! Now we shall learn something! [*Wild shrieks inside house from FATIMA. The GIRLS shriek. The two SLAVES try to climb on to the wall to escape, but fall down, and lie on the ground. FATIMA comes from the house, running and shrieking. The GIRLS cry out in sympathy, and crowd about her, exclaiming, and asking questions. They lead her to the bench, fan her, etc. One produces a smelling-bottle, another disappears into the shrubbery, then returns, bringing water in a gourd, etc., etc.*]

ANNE.

Oh, sister! Are you killed? Tell me you still live!

THE OTHERS.

Give her air. Fan her! Here, smell my salts! Water! Fetch water from the fountain! There, poor lamb! What did you find, Fatima?

FATIMA.

[*At last sufficiently restored to speak.*] The villain! The murderous villain! Six wives!

THE OTHERS.

Yes, yes!

FATIMA.

All killed! But in an excellent state of preservation!

THE OTHERS.

Yes, yes!

FATIMA.

Hung up, behind the door, on pegs! All six!

THE OTHERS.

No, no!

FATIMA.

All six; pegged up by the hair of their heads, behind the door!

THE OTHERS.

You don't say so!

FATIMA.

And a little pool of blood, under each peg!

THE OTHERS.

No; really?

FATIMA.

I assure you, 'tis so! Go see for yourselves!

THE OTHERS.

Never!

FATIMA.

But that's not the worst!

THE OTHERS.

What? Can anything be worse?

FATIMA.

Listen to me! There is a seventh peg! An empty one!

THE OTHERS.

[*Breathless.*] What! A seventh peg!

FATIMA.

An empty one! Waiting! [ALL groan, the SLAVES
the loudest.]

ANNE.

Oh, sister! Come, let us run away before the monster
returns!

THE OTHERS.

Yes, yes. Run away!

FATIMA.

I thought of that. But, no! If I run away from Bluebeard I also run away from his money, his oases, camels, date-palms, bathing establishment and jewelry business. Also I run away from the pleasing prospect of being in time his widow!

THE OTHERS.

There's something in that!

FATIMA.

No, no; my mind is quite made up. For the present I shall go on as if nothing unpleasant had occurred. I will receive him as joyfully as if I had not found him out. Also he must not find me out. The room must be locked up again. My keys, where are my keys? Oh, to be sure; I dropped them when I ran. Anne, you go fetch them, there's a dear.

ANNE.

I, sister? Not I, sister! I have a weak heart!

FATIMA.

Coward! Zobeide, Sekine, Pera?

ZOBEIDE.

Oh, I couldn't think of intruding!

SEKINE.

Nor I! Let Pera do it!

PERA.

When my elders refuse who am I to volunteer!

FATIMA.

Cowards! Here, slaves; Aziz, Zuzu, go fetch my keys!

SLAVES.

[*Rolling on the ground.*] Oh, Excellency!

AZIZ.

We are dust beneath your feet!

ZUZU.

Your other commands we obey on the wings of the wind! But this——! [*Both groan.*]

FATIMA.

Cowards! Is there no one who will stand by me?
[*Goes toward door. Pauses.*]

ZOBEIDE.

Oh, if you're making up a search party, I'll be one of a number! [*Follows.*]

ANNE.

I wouldn't mind a peep inside that room myself, in company!

SEKINE.

Let's all go together!

PERA.

Oh, yes! [ALL go, excitedly.]

FATIMA.

[About to go, calls to SLAVES.] Here, you miserable wretches! Go up to the tower and watch for my lord's return!

AZIZ.

On the wings of the wind, Excellency!

ZUZU.

On the wings of all the four winds of Heaven, Excellency! [The GIRLS go into the house. AZIZ and ZUZU go up a few steps of the tower while FATIMA is still in sight, then cautiously dismount, each making signs to the other.]

AZIZ.

This is the psychological moment for our fly-away!

ZUZU.

Nor need we go empty-handed! [BLUEBEARD enters stealthily, from the shrubbery.]

BLUEBEARD.

[To himself.] Nothing like a secret entrance to one's garden in order to study character—the character of one's household! [Approaches shuttered window.] As I ex-

pected! So, my fair Fatima; you are no exception to your sex! And, as you are inquisitive, you must die! [*Strokes beard reflectively.*] A pity. Quite a little bit of a pity. But it can't be helped! [*Looks about garden; sees SLAVES.*] Also as I expected, my two slaves, filling their sleeves with loot, in preparation to running away! Ahem!

AZIZ.

[*Ready to start, to ZUZU.*] Now! On the wings of the wind!

ZUZU.

On the wings of all four winds of Heaven!

BLUEBEARD.

[*Louder.*] Ahem! [*The SLAVES turn, hearing him, shriek with fright, drop their loot, and run toward the wall.*]

AZIZ.

On the wings of the wind, Zuzu.

ZUZU.

The wings of all four winds of Heaven, Aziz! [ZUZU mounts the shoulders of AZIZ, and gets on to wall. AZIZ seizes his legs, and draws himself up also, then they drop off on the other side, shrieking with fright. BLUEBEARD sits, shaking with laughter.]

BLUEBEARD.

Fools! Though but slaves, since those silly labor-laws were passed I owe them wages! But this quite absolves

me from paying them! The fools! [*Voices of the GIRLS heard approaching.*] Ha! Now to see how my Fatima will welcome me! [*Conceals himself in the shrubbery again. The GIRLS come from the house.*]

FATIMA.

There. That's done. And now for Bluebeard! How silly women are who are afraid of their husbands! Men are really the easiest things in the world to deceive! What's that? [*Suddenly notices speck on key.*]

THE OTHERS.

What is it?

FATIMA.

It looks like—— It is! I must have dropped it on the edge of one of those little pools! [*Rubbing the key on the ground.*] Funny it doesn't come off!

ZOBEIDE.

[*Picks up the still half-filled gourd.*] Try water!

FATIMA.

[*Tries water to it.*] It's no good! [*Breathes on key, rubs it with sleeve.*] One of the former Mrs. Bluebeards must have had indelible ink for blood!

ANNE.

What a way to talk of the departed!

FATIMA.

Well, you must admit that they were a pretty plain lot. A plain plain lot, rather! [*Still rubbing.*]

ANNE.

Won't it come off? I told you, you had better have taken Ahmet. He lives in a tent. He has no keys!

FATIMA.

Oh, well; I must trust to the old pet's not noticing it. Funny, but I begin to feel quite attached to him, now that I am going to get the better of him!

THE OTHERS.

That's right. You hold your own. You show him you are not afraid of him. In your place I would begin by saying, "Monster——" [BLUEBEARD, *unseen*, begins to sing. All but FATIMA run, frightened, and hide; ANNE behind a bush, the OTHERS inside the house, though still seen behind the door listening, every now and then.]

FATIMA.

[*Recovering from momentary fright, strikes an attitude.*] Hark, hark, the lark! No; larks sing only at dawn! The bulbul, perhaps. Yet bulbuls pipe mostly at eve! It is not—it cannot be—it is, it is, my bridegroom's voice! [BLUEBEARD *advances.*] My Lord! You are kindly welcome home!

BLUEBEARD.

Ha, my moon-faced angel, my tulip-cheeked Fatima! [Sits.]

FATIMA.

[*Piling cushions behind him.*] Did you have a prosperous errand?

BLUEBEARD.

Most condemnably the reverse! The knave whom I intended to cheat got ahead of me. He had bought the judge.

FATIMA.

Bought the judge? What for? Surely not as a household ornament! An antique?

BLUEBEARD.

As a cash-register! So underhand, after I had bribed the jury and witnesses!

FATIMA.

Next time you must corner the judge!

BLUEBEARD.

I have already placed orders with my broker to that effect. But enough of sordid business. How has my poppy-head beguiled the hours of my absence?

FATIMA.

House-cleaning, as you see! [*Waves hand towards garments on bushes.*] What an accumulation of rubbish! One would think you a second-hand clothes-dealer! Second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth-hand clothes-dealer, indeed!

BLUEBEARD.

Heirlooms! You have my keys?

FATIMA.

Your keys? Where did I put them? Oh, here! [*Hands over the keys.*]

BLUEBEARD.

Needless to ask if you used the forbidden one!

FATIMA.

As you say, needless to ask!

BLUEBEARD.

Needless to ask, because— [Examining the key.]
Oh, Fatima, Fatima! You, too! Oh, Fatima! Come,
you can't deny it, in the face of this!

FATIMA.

Deny it! I glory in it! Monster! I have found you
out! Six wives! Monster! *The NEIGHBORS and ANNE*
peer forth, applauding.

BLUEBEARD.

[Taken aback at her defiance.] What! My nutmeg
defies me—to my face?

FATIMA.

To your ugly face, and your ridiculous blue beard! Six
wives! Six wives, indeed! I won't stand for it, so there!
[Taps foot, impatiently.]

BLUEBEARD.

My stag-eyed houri forgets that the Turkish law allows
a man four wives, at least!

FATIMA.

At a time! Four wives at least, at a time! But, in
succession, done away with by violence? Never! Out-
rageous!

BLUEBEARD.

Dear, dear! These advanced notions—outrageous! Fatima, my clove-blossom, you are a menace to the public peace! Much as I deplore the painful necessity, I must add you to my collection of butterflies!

FATIMA.

Butterflies! Butterflies! How dare you call me a butterfly!

BLUEBEARD.

An emancipated specimen, I fear, but still a butterfly! And as such you, too, must occupy your destined peg!

FATIMA.

Oh, when it comes to a question of mere brute force any man is the superior of any woman! Brute force proves nothing!

BLUEBEARD.

Nothing, except the mere issues of life and death! Fatima, my cinnamon-stick, you must die!

FATIMA.

As you say! Death is annoying, but not final. I have, I feel it, a soul!

BLUEBEARD.

A soul! Nonsense! A woman with a soul? Piffle! Some fool European professor must have been spending his holidays in these parts, disseminating the germs of unbelief!

FATIMA.

Unbelief! In what, pray?

BLUEBEARD.

in the all-supremacy of Man! But, there, there, poor child. Be thankful you will perish in the spring of your rose-tinted bloom, before ideas have made you intelligent, highbrow and hideous! Are we alone? Anne, no doubt, is somewhere in hiding!

ANNE.

[*Appears, indignant.*] I'm no such thing! I mean, I am, and in hiding I intend to stay!

BLUEBEARD.

[*Laughs at ANNE.*] And those prying neighbors, Zobeide, Sekine, Pera, behind that door, I conjecture? [*Opens door, suddenly. The THREE fall forward, one atop of the other. They scramble to their feet, indignant.*]

ZOBEIDE.

We're not prying and hiding! Mr. Bluebeard, I call you a very poor example of a Turkish gentleman!

SEKINE.

You're no true Turkey! I mean, no true Turk! No, indeed!

PERA.

You are a true Turk, and worse I could not say! Truly and indeed a Turk!

BLUEBEARD.

[*Laughs at them.*] True to type, every one of you. But then, so am I! As Pera says, truly a Turk. More, a Turkish husband! Fatima, my stag-eyed charmer, since, as you think, you have a soul, I give you one hour and fifteen minutes, Eastern time, in which to say your prayers and make your peace with Heaven! And then——

FATIMA.

[*Slightly daunted.*] And then——?

BLUEBEARD.

[*Shows teeth, fiercely.*] And then, you die! [*Stalks grandly toward the house.*] And then—you die! [*At the door.*] You die! [*Goes into house, closing door behind himself.*]

FATIMA.

One hour and fifteen minutes—and then——!

THE OTHERS.

One hour and fifteen minutes—and then——!

FATIMA.

I die!

THE OTHERS.

You die! [*ALL join hands, try to sing, "BLUEBEARD," etc. Voices break.*]

CURTAIN. END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

Same Scene as Act II.

DISCOVERED: FATIMA in dejected attitude. ZOBELDE and SEKINE, one mounted on the other's shoulders, looking over the wall. Anne's feet visible on steps of tower. PERA holding ANNE's ankles to steady her. BLUEBEARD comes from the house with a large clock-face which he nails up on the door. All sigh loud and deep. He grins fiendishly and returns to the house.

FATIMA.

[*Lifts head.*] Any signs of anyone? Sekine——?

SEKINE.

Not yet!

FATIMA.

[*Raises voice.*] Anne—Sister Anne—from your tower—— Any signs of help?

ANNE.

Not yet!

PERA.

[*Repeating ANNE'S words.*] She says, "Not yet!"
[*ALL sigh. BLUEBEARD in shirt-sleeves comes from house with huge carving-knife. Crosses the garden in search of something. Returns with a whetstone. Pauses at door, puts hands of clock on five minutes, enters house. Is heard within, sharpening knife. ALL shudder.*]

FATIMA.

Ah, well! Kismet! [*ZOBEIDE and SEKINE approach.*]

ZOBEIDE.

Cheer up, Fatima! I feel sure help will come!

SEKINE.

Aziz and Zuzu swore they would fetch your brothers!

ZOBEIDE.

It was such luck that there they were, hiding underneath the wall!

SEKINE.

And, with the reward you promised them surely they will keep their word to run on the wings of the wind.

ZOBEIDE.

All the four winds of Heaven!

FATIMA.

But, such a long, long distance to my home. And if Hassam and Mustapha should be away!— Anne, Anne, don't you see anything?

ANNE.

[*Shouts.*] Yes! Something in sight!

PERA.

She says something in sight!

ALL.

[*Excited.*] Oh, help comes at last!

ANNE.

Oh, dear!

PERA.

Anne says, "Oh dear!"

ANNE.

[*Coming down.*] Such a cloud of dust I thought it must be horsemen. But, alas! Only a flock of sheep! One of them looked for all the world like Hassam!

ALL.

A flock of sheep! Alas! [*BLUEBEARD comes from house, watch in hand. Puts hands of clock on another five minutes.*]

ALL.

[*In suppressed tones.*] Monster!

BLUEBEARD.

[*Approaches FATIMA.*] Is there anything you'd like, my love? A cup of tea?

FATIMA.

Oh, get out!

BLUEBEARD.

Tut, tut! Temper! [*Goes into house. Is heard sharpening knife.*]

ANNE.

[*Has returned to tower, cries out.*] Oh, oh! Something on the horizon!

THE OTHERS.

[*Excited.*] Oh, help at last!

ANNE.

[*Coming down, dejected.*] Alas! I made sure it was Mustapha's profile—but it was only a chicken-hawk, crossing the face of the sun!

ALL.

Alas! [*ANNE sniffs audibly, wipes eyes.*]

FATIMA.

Don't cry! Don't give him that satisfaction!

ANNE.

I was only trying my new pocket-handkerchiefs! [*ZUZU peers over the wall.*]

ZUZU.

[*In whisper.*] Excellency! Excellency!

ALL.

What's that?

ZUZU.

[*Falls off the wall, followed by Aziz.*] Your prostrated slave!

AZIZ.

As dust beneath your feet!

BOTH.

[*Rising.*] The reward! We claim the reward!

FATIMA.

How so? Is help at hand?

AZIZ.

At hand, indeed! We fell in with your brother Mustapha!

FATIMA.

My brave brother Mustapha! But why comes he not?

ZUZU.

He went to fetch your brother Hassam!

FATIMA.

My noble brother Hassam! But where is he?

AZIZ.

He and Mustapha together went to fetch your old sweetheart Ahmet!

FATIMA.

[*Hand on heart.*] Ahmet! And he——?

ZUZU.

He went, accompanied by Hassam and Mustapha, to the magistrate's, to get out a warrant!

FATIMA.

A warrant? Why should they need a warrant to stop a murderous villain from chopping up his little cinnamon-stick wife?

ZUZU.

That is not the idea, Excellency! But Ahmet has just stolen—borrowed, a motor-car from a missionary, as a rebuke for attempting to convert him to an outrageous creed in which cruelty is met with kindness.

FATIMA.

Just like my Ahmet! But what is a motor-car?

ZUZU.

A caravan without the camels, Excellency. A cart drawn by horses that furnish the motive power by absent treatment. A litter on wheels that is endowed with magic power to fly on the wings of the wind, unless the Turkish Patrol endeavors to stop it, and even then, ordinarily, it runs down the Turkish Patrol!

FATIMA.

I see. But about the warrant?

AZIZ.

Your noble brothers, Hassam and Mustapha, ride their Arab steeds, but Ahmet, for the sake of speed uses the stolen car! Behold an obstacle! The invisible demon that makes its wheels go round has to be propitiated with offerings of a peculiar, mal-odorous kind of oil! And this devil oil, inflated with vanity, loses its head at being so much in demand, and keeps putting an ever-increasing market value on itself. Well, in order to have money enough to buy this devil-oil to feed this speed-god in order to reach your Excellency to save your Excellency's life, young Ahmet conceived the brilliant idea of getting out a warrant to arrest the price of petrol, gasoline, whatever they call the stuff!

FATIMA.

How like my Ahmet! Oh, Ahmet, Ahmet, may your plan succeed! Oh, Anne, watch out for my brothers on their Arab steeds, and my noble Ahmet in his stolen speed-god car!

ANNE.

[*Runs up tower steps.*] I'll watch with eyes that pierce the future, never fear!

FATIMA.

Oh, Ahmet, Ahmet, speed! Run down the Turkish Patrol to save your childhood-sweetheart Fatima, for my heartbeats are numbered, my little scroll of life unfolds to its closing paragraph, the sands of my brief morning are nearly run! [*BLUEBEARD, with a fiendish grin, comes from the house, and alters the hands of the clock.*]

ANNE.

Nothing in sight!

FATIMA.

Alas!

THE NEIGHBORS.

[Weeping.] Alas!

BLUEBEARD.

Now, my clove-blossom, my lump of Turkish delight, down on your knees, and——

ANNE.

[With excited shriek.] Sister! Sister! Oh, Fatima, they come, they come!

FATIMA.

At last! At last!

ANNE.

[Running down.] A carriage that has left its horse in the stable, with Ahmet in goggles, like the sun-god in his chariot, steering it as a helmsman steers a ship, while the speed-god inside shrieks vainly for more oil, and Mustapha and Hassam race wildly to keep up with it on their Arab steeds!

FATIMA.

Saved! Heaven be praised! Saved! [The NEIGHBORS and SLAVES echo this.]

BLUEBEARD.

[*Who has paused, amazed.*] What is all this prating! Saved, indeed? [*Chase. FATIMA, who has run to the rear wall.*] Come back instantly, Fatima, that I may kill you! [*Motor-horn and horses are heard approaching. Shouts are heard. AHMET, HASSAM and MUSTAPHA jump over wall. The GIRLS shout welcome.*]

THE BROTHERS AND AHMET.

[*Rapturously.*] Sister! Fatima!

FATIMA.

Hassam! Mustapha! Ahmet!

BLUEBEARD.

What is the meaning of this unseemly intrusion? Who are these? What, my wife's family! Uninvited!

HASSAM AND MUSTAPHA.

[*Seizing him.*] Your wife's family, with a vengeance! Villain!

AHMET.

[*Brandishing a scroll.*] Double-dyed villain!

BLUEBEARD.

I assure you, one single treatment of indigo suffices—renewed at every new moon! But who are you to beard me, with a silly parchment for weapon?

AHMET.

Look at me!

BLUEBEARD.

No beard to speak of!

AHMET.

I scorn concealments! My name is Ahmet!

BLUEBEARD.

A common name!

AHMET.

A proper one, rather! Villain. I am the orphan whose inheritance you sequestrated!

BLUEBEARD.

Dear, dear! Poor lad!

AHMET.

[*To the group.*] He was my father's lifelong friend. My father made him my trustee!

BLUEBEARD.

The old duffer should have known what to expect! Trustees are always their own beneficiaries!

AHMET.

Fortunately, I found you out! This place is mine!

FATIMA.

[*Surprised and overjoyed.*] What? Yours!

AHMET.

Also your date-palms, oases, camels, bathing establishment and jewelry business!

FATIMA.

Oh, Ahmet ; I always liked you best !

BLUEBEARD.

Tut, tut, my Sultana ! You don't go with the rest of the property !

HASSAM AND MUSTAPHA.

Villain ! Monster ! As you took your wives in succession instead of by the bunch the law sets Fatima free !

FATIMA.

Free ! Ha, ha ! Free !

HASSAM AND MUSTAPHA.

Duck him in the fountain !

ALL.

Yes, yes ! Duck him in the fountain ! [HASSAM and MUSTAPHA, followed by the group, carry BLUEBEARD into the shrubbery. He is heard shouting protests. A loud splash, and the derisive laughter of the group drown his voice. They return, still carrying him.]

HASSAM AND MUSTAPHA.

Now throw him over the wall. Into the arms of the Turkish Patrol ! [TURKISH PATROL, heard approaching. A bench is dragged to the wall. The BROTHERS mount this. BLUEBEARD is thrown over the wall. Shouts on both sides, inside and out.]

BLUEBEARD.

[Appears, head over wall.] Ladies and gentlemen——

[*There is silence, to hear him.*] Turks and Turkesses. If you think I give in, in the slightest, to your modern views, you will find yourselves mistaken. Who laughs last laughs best, and my laugh has yet to be heard in the land! Fatima is my wife, and Ahmet shall not despoil me of her simply to get even with me, because I sequestered his inheritance to my own superior needs!

FATIMA.

You say I am your lawful wife! How about the others, my predecessors?

BLUEBEARD.

Why, my dear, what do you know about them?

FATIMA.

Everything!

BLUEBEARD.

Then you know that they are waiting for me, six in a row, at the gates of Paradise!

FATIMA.

We'll see about that! [*Claps hands.*] Aziz! Zuzu! Obey the commands I just laid upon you!

THE SLAVES.

On the wings of the winds, Excellency, the four winds of Heaven! [*They go into the house.*]

FATIMA.

There is one possession Ahmet will not dispute with

you: the ladies who are waiting for you, six in a row, at the doors of an establishment somewhat nearer than Paradise! [*General laughter, mocking BLUEBEARD.*]

BLUEBEARD.

I do not understand this prying into my private affairs! I will not deny that I have collected wives, as other men collect other works of art, also that I have hung them in a gallery, like rare paintings, as indeed they were. Though I do not wish to boast of being a philanthropist, on my death it will be found that I have bequeathed the collection, including Fatima, to the art-museum of Constantinople.

FATIMA.

Including Fatima! Hear that!

ANNE.

All I can say is that such a connection by marriage should be disconnected, immediately!

AHMET.

As indeed it is! Bluebeard, among the warrants which I brought from the magistrate, for, finding that he makes a liberal reduction if one buys them wholesale I laid in a vast supply, is one which, pursued to its conclusion, severs the tie between you and Fatima! [*Producing and waving scroll.*]

ALL THE OTHERS EXCEPT BLUEBEARD.

Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!

BLUEBEARD.

I consider this demonstration in the worst of taste!

AHMET.

[*Producing and waving another scroll.*] Another compels you publicly to recognize and support your six earlier wives!

BLUEBEARD.

I tell you the dear things are now immortal, catalogued as works of art, and in a somewhat imperfect condition, I fear!

AHMET.

They can be restored. It is done all the time, so that not even an old master himself can ever tell the difference!

FATIMA.

Ha, ha! They are restored, and to life!

BLUEBEARD.

[*Agitated.*] What? Alive? All six!

FATIMA.

See for yourself! [*AZIZ and ZUZU come from the house, carrying six enormous dolls. ALL laugh, mocking BLUEBEARD who runs with cries of horror, to the rear wall, and after one or two unsuccessful attempts to climb it, finally succeeds in so doing. Shouts from the TURKISH PATROL, who are waiting for him outside, and who show their heads over the wall triumphantly.*]

BLUEBEARD.

[*Trying to climb back into the garden.*] I find that I have fallen into the clutches of that gang of pirates, the Constantinopolice!

PATROL.

Eh! Careful what you say!

BLUEBEARD.

Let me return and dally in the garden a while, till the Turkish Patrol shall have dropped their rôle!

PATROL.

[*Outside.*] Come back!

ALL.

[*Within the garden.*] Go back! [*He is pushed and pulled back, till he falls off the wall, outside.*]

FATIMA.

Now take your wives! Look out! Here comes your first! Halima!

THE OTHERS.

Yes, yes! Here comes Halima!

BLUEBEARD.

[*Protesting.*] No, not! Not Halima!

THE OTHERS.

Yes! Halima! [*HALIMA is thrown over to him, and*

this proceeding is repeated till BLUEBEARD has received all his six wives.]

BLUEBEARD.

[*Mounting the wall.*] Everything seems to be at sixes and sevens, to-day!

PATROL.

Come back!

THE OTHERS.

Go back! [*Again he is dragged and pushed back, and again he appears.*]

BLUEBEARD.

I say; while you are about it can't you throw in Fatima. I mean, throw out Fatima—for good measure! [*Again he is cast out.*]

AHMET.

[*Mounting the wall.*] Have you them all? Wait, Patrol! He must give a receipt for them!

HASSAM AND MUSTAPHA.

Aye; let him sign a receipt!

AHMET.

[*Dismounting.*] I'll draw up the form! [*Takes out a warrant.*] On the back of this!

FATIMA.

Shall I fetch you a quill, dear? And an ink-horn?

AHMET.

[*Writing.*] It is not necessary, my love. I have an invention of my own, for which I am taking out a patent. I treat the surface of the parchment with mud, then trace characters on it with a stick moistened with water. I call it a fountain-pen! You have to wash in the fountain after using it!

THE OTHERS.

[*Admiringly.*] A fountain pen! Wonderful!

ANNE.

Oh, what a clever family we are! For Ahmet now is one of us!

BLUEBEARD.

[*On the wall.*] That was my fatal mistake: marrying into a clever family!

AHMET.

Sign here! [*Presents him with the parchment and pen.*]

BLUEBEARD.

[*Reading.*] Received in an excellent state of preservation, half a dozen wives, invoiced as Halima, Khadijah, etc. Well, Kismet, I suppose! [*Signs.*]

THE OTHERS.

Kismet, indeed!

PERA.

Kismet indeed and truly!

BLUEBEARD.

In conclusion let me remark : Turks and Turkesses——

PATROL.

Come back!

BLUEBEARD.

Don't tug so hard! Cannot you allow me a few last words before I depart, elsewhere to pursue my career of crime?

FATIMA.

Stay to breakfast, you and your wives—our wedding breakfast, Ahmet's and mine! Come round by the front way!

BLUEBEARD.

I thank you, but a pressing engagement elsewhere——
[Suddenly breaks away and runs out of sight. Great excitement of PATROL and shrieks from the six wives. ALL looking over the wall, cry out, crying, "Catch him!" Then BLUEBEARD is dragged into the garden, by way of the house, by the PATROL, with his six wives. ALL form a circle about him, derisively singing the first verse of the song "Bluebeard." Then the three NEIGHBORS face the audience, and sing a concluding verse:

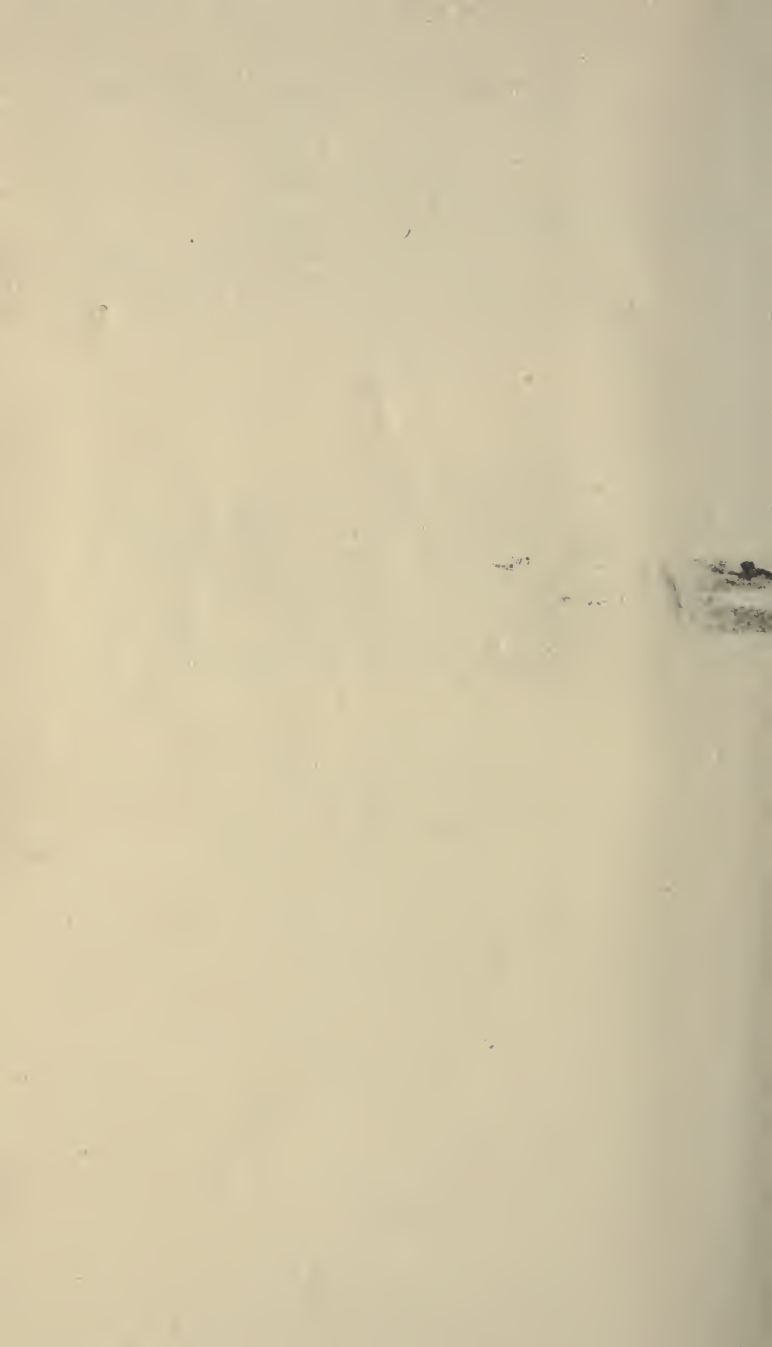
Bluebeards, ye with seven wives——
 One, two, three, four, five, six, seven!
 You will always lose your lives,
 But not always go to Heaven!

April fools, you!
Woman schools you,
Though you naughty, naughty husbands be!
On your knees, and let your spouses
Keep your keys and rule your houses,
For the happy end you see!

CURTAIN.

Then the CURTAIN is raised, discovering BLUEBEARD sitting disconsolately in a corner, with his six wives, while the OTHERS dance round AHMET and FATIMA singing, "Let them live the happiest couple in Constanti-nan-ti-nanti-nople!" Then they turn to the audience, and pelt them with confetti, flowers and streamers, as they finish the song.]

END OF PLAY.



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